

NOVEMBER 1999 **FREE**

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Inside:
Your Unofficial
Guide to the
Northampton
Film Festival

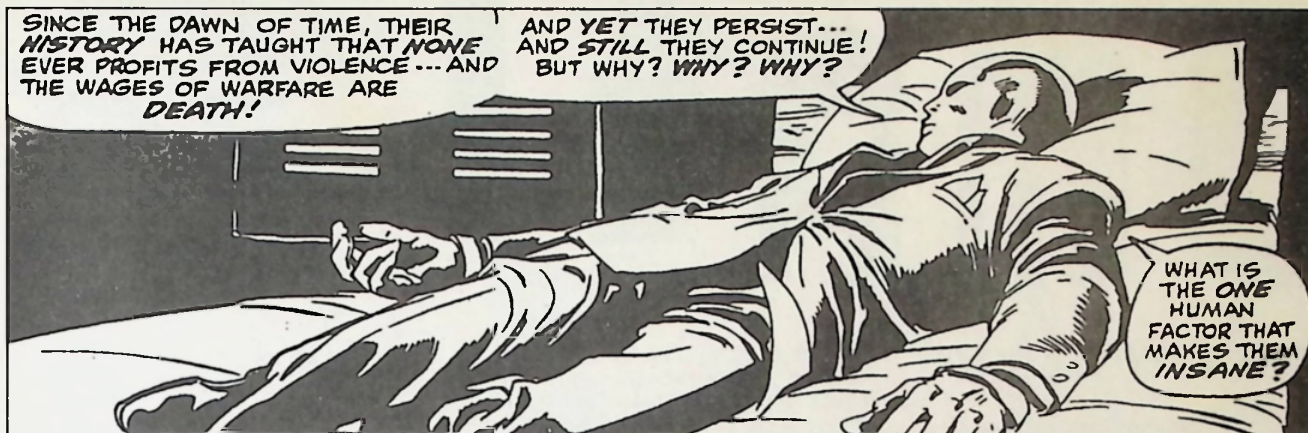
The ~~Candidate~~

On the Campaign Trail
with Tony Long
by David Biederman

Plus:
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3rd Party Politics
Charles Bukowski
Books, Videos, Comics
CD Reviews

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publisher/editor/design
MURPHY

sales manager

KYLE ALEXANDRA COHEN

editorial assistant

AUNDRIA THEOCLES

artistic assistant

ANDREA CARLIN

staff artist

MATT SMITH

distribution

REIKKA MCCRAY

legal counsel

DANIEL O. OFFNER

bookkeeping

KATIE LARKIN

accounting

LINDA SHEAR

cover photo

ROBERT TOBEY

U M A i L

POB 774
NORTHAMPTON
MA 01061-0774
VCROMAG@AOL.COM

SHOOTING YUP

Hey.

I'm getting in touch with you because of a recent article by Duke Aaron on the needle exchange in Northampton (VMag, Sept.). I thought the article was great and wondered if there are other articles by him on the topic. I do field research with injection drug users here in Springfield, and we are concerned about getting a needle exchange here. Let me know what else you have about needle exchange, ok? Thanks a lot.

Cara S. Siano, MPH
Ethnographer
Hispanic Health Council
Syringe Access, Use, and
Discard Study
Springfield SW Community
Health Center
Springfield, MA

Thanks but since that's the only piece we've ever run on needle exchange Duke'll give you a call to see if there are any other ways we can be of assistance.

THE LONG WAS SHORT OF IT

Media Dog.

I read with a great deal of interest your interview of Tony Long (VMag, Sept.) now a Mayoral candidate here in Northampton. In his campaign material Long touts himself as "ethical, moral, judicious, caring, balanced," etc. However, I did not observe these attributes in this interview or in his role as talk-show host.

For example, in answer to your questions about whether any media outlet is balanced and objective, Long wonders how editors and station managers get the authority to decide what is news and what is not. He concludes this rumination with this statement: "Ron Hall? Ron Hall is 80 years old and doesn't have a clue as to what is important in today's news but he is making those decisions. Larry Parnass

from the *Gazette*? Jim Foudy? Stan Moulton? These guys are idiots." This is judicious? This is balanced? And it is not accurate, but then Tony did not claim to be accurate.

I would submit to Media Dog that Long was not let go because some Bill Hess wants "stuff that is non-offensive and easily canned." I suggest that Long was careless and ineffectual as a talk-show host. It is to WHMP's credit that three years was too Long a time for that type of radio. I wrote a letter to WHMP two years ago in which I told of Long saying that he had to listen to tapes of his program to find out what he said during it because he did not listen to what he said while on-air. I maintained that Long must not give his own words much value if he ranted on not knowing what was coming out.

I also reported hearing Long deplore the lack of candidates in the 197 municipal election and he concluded "when candidates do show up what do we get but a video-store clerk and a short-order cook." Little did Long know that in two years time a mayoral candidate from Hatfield, a fired talk-show host, would be a candidate for Mayor. What started out as an April Fool's Day joke became a reality.

In conclusion, I would like to point out that Media Dog did for Long what Long said the mainline press doesn't do in Northampton: MD did not ask the tough questions of Tony Long. MD accepted his statements at face value and that can only be due to MD's lack of journalistic experience. What goes around, comes around, eh?

Bill Ames
Northampton, MA

Indeed, tough questions do have their place, Bill. However there's also something to be said about letting an interview subject speak for themselves, with minimal interruption and leading, particularly when such a process is more revealing, yielding as it does an inside look at what the subject thinks of himself and others. It was not a case of the tail wagging the um, media dog.

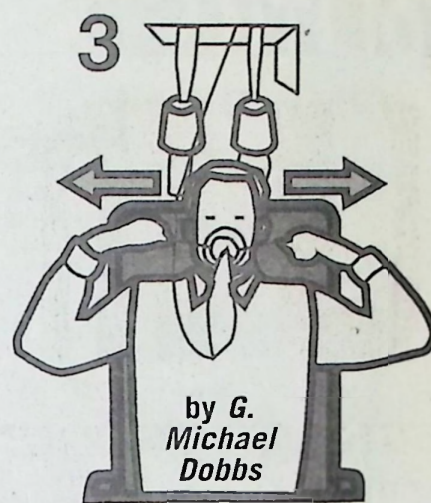
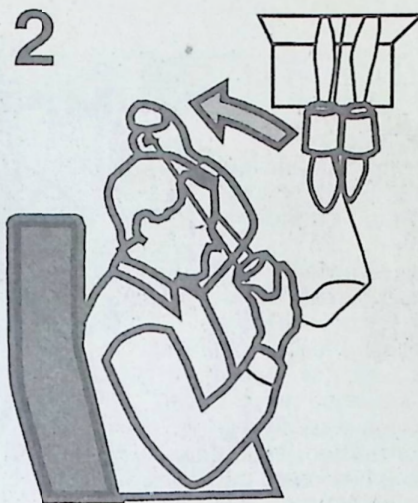
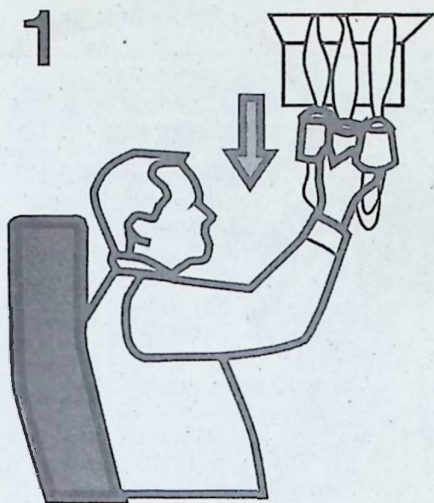
FODOR'S 'R US

Dear Murphy et al.

A quick note to let you know how much I've enjoyed your magazine. The town profiles that I've read over the past year have been detailed, quirky and well written. The article on Springfield of a few months ago was particularly good, and I've sent it to friends in California, Portugal and England as a sweet introduction to my home base. I'm very fond of cartoons and illustrations, and you use a wide assortment to great effect. The assortment of articles and reviews are a great bunch of interesting musings that I've read with gusto. Thanks for turning out a quality product.

Gary Wadas
Springfield

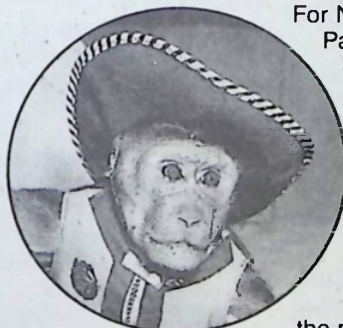




MAG Third Party Primer

Is it Bob Gore or Al Bradley? Do you care that yellow is Elizabeth Dole's favorite color? Is George W. Bush's cocaine use really an issue? Do mainstream politics leave you cold? If the phrase "third party" simply means someone standing outside a grocery store trying to get a name on the ballot or just talk show fodder, then think again. Low voter turn-out in many recent elections indicates that many Americans are completely disgusted with the two major parties and are seeking an alternative which truly speaks for them.

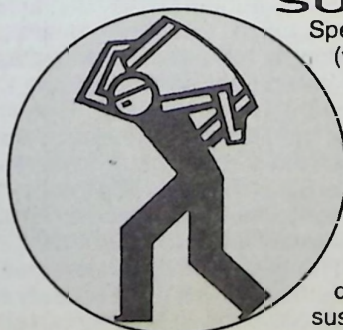
From Teddy Roosevelt's Bull Moose Party to Alabama governor George Wallace and his American Independent Party, this country has a rich history of people rejecting the Democrats and Republicans for "third" parties. This tradition is live and well here in the Bay State and the following are some of the third parties active in our state.



NATURAL LAW PARTY

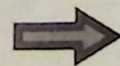
For New Agers seeking a political party, The Natural Law Party (www.natural-law.org) was made for them. The slogan of the organization is "Bringing the light of science into politics." Many New Age ideas, such as holistic approaches, Transcendental Meditation, and "yogic flying" are offered as remedies for much of our national and international problems. On the economy, the Natural Lawists would "implement a pro-growth economic policy, with a truly balanced budget (not a "surplus" that exists only as an accounting fiction) by 2002 and a low flat tax of 10% by 2006."

Putting faith in human ability seems to be a large part of the party's philosophy as the stance on economic matters continues. "Fully harness America's most precious resource — the unlimited intelligence and creativity of America's 270 million citizens. In today's information-based economy, intelligence and creativity, innovation and ideas, drive economic growth. The Natural Law Party strongly supports proven educational, job training, and apprenticeship programs that develop intelligence and creativity and prevent school dropouts. Only the full utilization of our human resource through the Natural Law Party's fundamental commitment to education will ensure America's competitiveness and future leadership in the family of nations."

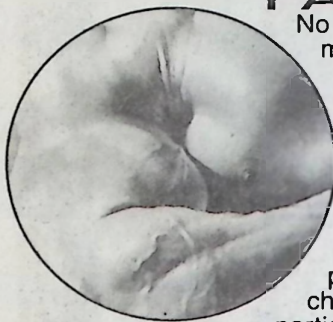


SOCIALIST PARTY

Speaking of old-fashioned radicals, The Socialist Party (www.sp-usa.org) is alive and well. It "strives to establish a radical democracy that places people's lives under their own control — a non-racist, classless, feminist, socialist society in which people cooperate at work, at home, and in the community." The word "socialist" has been pretty much a curse in American politics for years, and the Socialist party is quick to note that it does not espouse a Communist philosophy. The Socialist Party of Western Massachusetts can be reached via e-mail at susandor@crocker.com.



REFORM PARTY



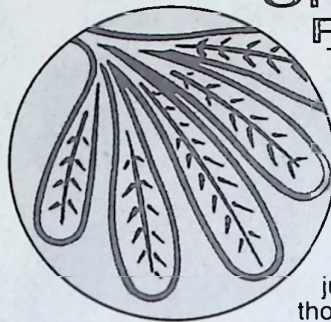
No third party has attracted more attention in the last 20 years than The Reform Party

(www.reformparty.org). Started by billionaire Ross Perot in 1995 as the vehicle for his political beliefs, the Reform Party attracted many people who felt disenfranchised from other political parties. The grass roots party

grew to become a serious political entity and found itself thrust into the national spotlight again in 1998 when its candidate for governor of Minnesota, the wrestler/actor Jesse Ventura, won in an amazing upset.

The platform of the Reform Party is just that... reformation of the American political system. Campaign reform is a keystone of the organization. They would "reduce the cost of campaigns by shortening the election cycle to no more than four months. Hold elections on Saturdays and Sundays, not Tuesdays, so working people can get to the polls. Replace the Electoral College process for electing the President with a direct vote from the citizens, so that every vote counts. Prohibit announcements of exit polls until all voting has been completed in Hawaii. Require Members of Congress to raise all campaign funds from the voters in their district. Require members of the Senate to raise all campaign funds from the voters in their state." On economic issues, they would "eliminate the practice of keeping some programs off-budget. Pass the Balanced Budget Amendment... Promote and protect good paying productive jobs for US workers. Trade agreements must be based on the principle that production, not consumption, makes a country and its citizens prosperous... Create a New Tax System. The new tax system must be fair. The new tax system must be paperless. The new tax system must raise the money required to pay the bills."

MASSACHUSETTS GREEN PARTY



The Massachusetts Green Party

(www.enviroweb.org/massgreens/) is part of the world-wide Green Party which advocates environmental reform and preservation. It's not just a one-issue party, though as the group's Ten Key Values illustrates:

1. Ecological Wisdom
2. Grassroots Democracy
3. Social Justice
4. Nonviolence
5. Decentralization
6. Community Based Economics
7. Personal and Global Responsibility
8. Feminism
9. Future Focus
10. Respect for Diversity

If you miss an unabashed radical leftist agenda, than the Greens may be the party for you. On economic issues their stand is "First, we want to force the conversion of the military budget to civilian use. The key words in a Green economic plan are: sustainability, life-affirming, self reliance, community-based, true cost pricing, a global economy of locally owned and operated cooperatives, reduce, reuse, recycle. Also: conservation, efficiency, labor intensive, worker-run, low consumption, less consumerism. We want a return of state and federal resources to the local level, an end to subsidies, redistribution of wealth—not only across class lines, but also across the hemispheres, and down through the generations. We support neither a state-run nor free market economy. We support, above all, economic justice."

MASSACHUSETTS LIBERTARIAN PARTY



"What a great time it is to be a Libertarian" declares the Massachusetts Libertarian Party website (www.la-ma.org). Until the advent of the Reform Party the Libertarians were probably the best known of the American third parties.

Attracting both liberals and conservatives, the Libertarians would repeal much of the law which governs American life. They truly have the stance of that tired old chestnut of "getting government off our backs." They call for a shaking up of the status quo and a return to a government defined almost solely by the Constitution and the Bill of Rights. The problem is that many of their goals attract and repel potential voters at the same time. For instance, they would make abortions completely legal (a liberal cause), but also abolish gun control (a conservative issue). The party will run a presidential ticket in the next election, and also has a candidate facing Senator Kennedy next year. Currently the party has five candidates for local positions in Massachusetts.

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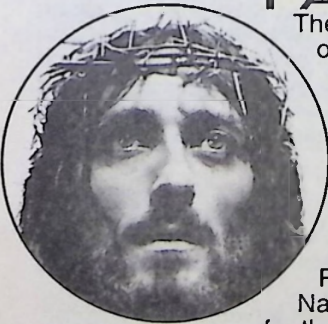


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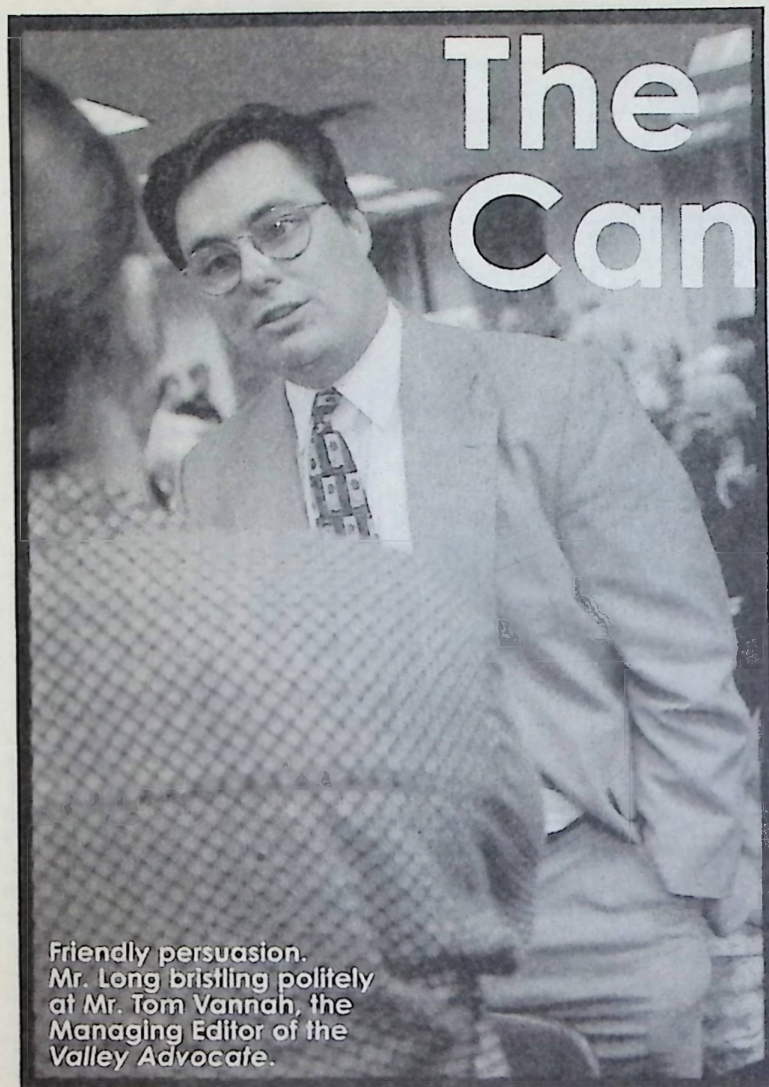
CONSTITUTION PARTY



The Constitution Party (www.USTaxpayers.org) puts more of its faith in God than in its fellow man. In the party's preamble, they "gratefully acknowledge the blessing of the Lord God as Creator, Preserver and Ruler of the Universe and of this Nation. We solemnly declare that the foundation of our political position and moving principle of our political activity is our full submission and unshakable faith in our Savior and Redeemer, our Lord Jesus Christ. We hereby appeal to Him for mercy, aid, comfort, guidance and the protection of His Divine Providence as we work to restore and preserve this Nation as a government of the People, by the People, and for the People."

Originally founded in 1992 with the hopes of offering Pat Buchanan a political party to call his own, the Constitution Party is against "big" government, believes welfare should be handled by churches, is afraid America will be involved in a "New World Order, and is anti-abortion, anti-immigration, and anti-gun control. The party is running a candidate against Senator Ted Kennedy for the 2000 senate race: Philip L. Lawlor, editor of the on-line Catholic World News, will be facing the long-time Democratic senator.

In the event of a loss of confidence in the political system masks supplying Nitrous Oxide will release from the overhead panel. Place the mask securely over your face and breath deeply to relieve the stress of impending sameness.



The Candidate

On the
Campaign Trail
with Tony Long
by David Biederman

photos and captions
by Robert Tobey

Friendly persuasion.
Mr. Long bristling politely
at Mr. Tom Vannah, the
Managing Editor of the
Valley Advocate.

Stop the presses," I say into my tape recorder as Tony Long and I drive down Main Street on a fine late September morning. "Tony is no yahoo."

Northampton mayoral candidate Long is describing his family and business background as he had just done in an appearance before the Northampton Area Business Council (NABC), an arm of the Chamber of Commerce. He and his opponent, Clare Higgins, had been asked to explain what each would do as mayor for the local business community.

Long has a lot of explaining to do. It's tough to be a candidate for mayor in a high-strung liberal town — a town that has been described on national TV as the Lesbian Capital of America — when you are perceived to be a right-wing, former talk show host, and a homophobic one at that. It isn't easy getting your message across when you're a high school dropout in a town where even some of the panhandlers have graduate degrees.

Tony pulls his Saab into a parking space across from Starbucks. Lest anyone confuse him with the yuppies who are definitely not his constituency, he points out that the car has 260,000 miles on the odometer and a fried transmission.

"My grandfather was a VP for Allstate, my uncle is an executive with the Royal Insurance Company and my father owns his own

insurance agency," said Long. "I come from business and I come from money and I've always lived a very comfortable life but I am not a yahoo about it. I'm not a stuck-up, pompous man. I know how to live a comfortable life and still be able to watch a football game at the local neighborhood bar and, you know, just enjoy life."

"Instead of," I ask?

"Instead of being so uptight and tense and pompous all the time, like certain members of the downtown community, like it's a separate part of society."

"Are there really two Northamptons?"

"I think so, absolutely," Tony said.

"There are people in this community that can't afford to go downtown and have no desire to just because of the atmosphere down there; it's very cappuccino, double-espresso, latte, where these guys just want a black cup of joe. Coffee says a lot about a community."

"The coffee is much better down-

town," I say.

"I don't think so," Tony said. "I would much rather go up to Smitty's and get a cup of coffee in a styrofoam cup than go to Starbucks and pay \$3.50 for..."

"It's \$1.38 for a cup of the best French Roast around," I interject.

"A dollar thirty-eight for a cup of coffee? Please, that's ridiculous," said Tony.

"You'd rather drink dishwasher?"

"It's not dishwasher," said Tony. "Are you part of that crowd? You're a tree-huggin, pompous hippie. When you have to walk into a coffee shop and have someone decipher the menu for your selections..."

It was decided that I would act as Long's guide on his first trip ever to Starbucks. I would handle the translations. He just wanted a black cup of coffee, and I said it could be done, and it was done. Tony was uncomfortable when we first entered but the sight of Rice Crispy cakes made him feel more at home; "That's my level," he said. "I make those for my daughter."

For the record, Long drank an entire grande (translation: medium) cup of hazelnut. He appeared to enjoy it although he never said so outright. He did say that the high-octane joe made his ears ring.

THE COMMENT

The notion of acting as a translator in politics is not that far-fetched. "Politics has its own language," wrote Hunter Thompson in the classic **Fear and Loathing on the Campaign Trail**. "It is often so complex that it borders on being a code, and the main trick in political journalism is learning how to translate — to make sense of the partisan bullshit that even your friends will lay on you — without crippling your access to the kind of information that allows you to keep functioning."

Thompson's observations are no less true of local campaigns than of national ones. Truth is never an option unless you want to find yourself in a position where no one takes your phone calls.

The amazing fact that Tony Long is running for Mayor of Northampton — the fact that the talk jock/salesman came in second out of a field of six primary candidates — is what motivated me to cover the dull

ritual of a small-town election. At the very least, Long's campaign is high irony; at best it's a stark and depressing parable about the state of politics at century's end.

Northampton spoke when it put Long on the ballot but the quirky little town spoke in code. I can't translate the voter's bizarre verdict in selecting Long and Higgins; it may mean nothing at all. I did manage to stumble across some highly eccentric local color, and a few general themes did emerge. Voters are pissed and apathetic in equal measure; class issues are alive and well in Northampton; real issues have no place in campaigns, and politics — OK, Tony, and journalism, too — is a hack profession.

Long, who never thought he would be a candidate for anything, had in a few short weeks taken to the platitudes of politics like a duck to water. "I am a moderate conservative," he told me. That was on October 1; he had just finished arguing with editors at *Bay Windows*, a Boston-based gay publication that is covering the election. Tony is pissed that they only want to talk about "The Comment," that would be the one Tony made about running down gay men in crosswalks, the one that got him fired from his beloved talk job at WHMP.

"*Bay Windows* did four separate articles about it and never contacted me," said Long. "I asked them why they're covering this story, and they said because your opponent is a lesbian, but when I asked them if sexuality was an issue in this campaign, they said no."

"They're an advocacy paper," I said. "They should promote a pro-gay agenda."

"I have not yet, nor will I, use Clare Higgin's sexuality as a campaign issue," said Tony, in true Dick Nixon fashion. "But they want to use it in their favor and they chastise anyone who uses it against her."

Long doesn't think "The Comment" should count more than other comments he has made about raising money for Food Not Bombs, the Jimmy Fund, the Northampton Survival Center, or about "attention to basic quality-of-life issues."

"If you're gay," I said, "I think there's something visceral that they're responding to."

"I can understand it back then, sure, but we responded to it,"

said Tony. "Why now seven months later is this still a topic for discussion?"

THE LUNATIC

Long wants to move beyond "The Comment" to "The Issues," and he got his chance at the NABC meeting at the Northampton Inn. Suzanne Beck, head of the Chamber of Commerce, had cheerfully informed me that the press was excluded from the session, so I sat on a chair in the lobby, stared at the mauve walls and eavesdropped on the proceedings.

Tony was up first. He read from a prepared text. No, he does not support an architectural review committee; is against extending the smoking ban; is against the living wage campaign, rent control and a 3% property surcharge for a Land Bank.

Someone said that people know Tony mainly through his talk-show; why should anyone believe he has changed his stripes and will be cooperative instead of negative?

Tony said that, as a talk jock, his job was to generate revenue; "You don't accomplish that by being a happy-go-lucky kind of guy on the radio," he said. He acknowledged some "inappropriate behavior" and said he would leave "show value" out of the campaign.

"How do I snap my fingers and say I'm a sensible, balanced guy?" he asked. Then, explaining why electing Tony Long as Mayor was a no-risk proposition for the City, he handed his head to the hostile crowd.



Mary Clare Higgins, bristling with restraint at a recent candidate's forum. She didn't like being in the same room with the man who suggested it might be a good idea to run down gays in the crosswalks.

"Northampton could literally elect a raging lunatic — not that I'm saying that I am — and in the worst case scenario things would run as they are now because the City Council would make sure that the raging lunatic would not destroy the City," said Long. "The best case scenario is that everything I am saying is true; I am business-friendly, I keep taxes low, I am fiscally responsible. The upside is tremendous; the downside is non-existent. I prove to be a complete bumbling idiot, a political hack, a waste of time and two years from now you vote someone else in as mayor."

Judith Fine, a business owner and member of the Parking Commission, socked Long with questions about parking fines and the homeless. The latter; Tony wants the homeless put in construction trailers that would sit in the Roundhouse Plaza parking lot in winter. The former; Tony supports having parking officers put quarters in expired meters.

That suggestion caused Fine to have a snit fit; she claimed the idea as her own. "Tony," she pounded,

"please do not ever tell that that is your idea when you speak to anybody because that has been my idea."

The sputtering Fine supplied Long with his one moment of dignity. He said he never took credit for the idea, which he hadn't, but that he supported it.

The third question... well, I never heard it because Judith Fine came into the hallway and demanded to know who I was, what I was doing and who I wrote for.

"VMag," I said.

"That is extremely unethical," she huffed.

"You don't know what you're talking about," I said. "Eavesdropping is a time-honored tradition in journalism."

"I still don't appreciate your being here," stammered Fine, as she closed the door. "I want you to know there's a reporter out there from VMag taking notes," I heard her mutter.

Oh, no, I thought to myself, not a lecture on ethics by a member of the NABC, which counts among its members major players in the Heritage Bank Scandal. That was Northampton's ugliest hour, and like this campaign, it was about two separate Northampton; the downtown crowd made off like bandits while the unsecured creditors and small contractors — the Florence crowd — were screwed out of their shoes. That kind of hypocrisy could generate a limited amount of sympathy even for a yahoo like Tony Long.

THE BACKSTORY

After the meeting Tony tapped out rhythms on the dashboard of his ailing Saab. "Some ears perked up in there," he said; "Hey, this guy has a little juice going on," was Long's estimate of the impression he just left behind, despite the fact that two questioners referred to the hypothetical "raging lunatic."

Tony is a novice but does not appear to be a lunatic. He's 29 years old, beefy and handsome, it's been said, with black hair combed back in a 1950's style. In fact Tony carries himself like a 50's kind of guy, real confident and with a kind of swagger, a hellraiser by nature who has learned the language of the squares. He has a great voice and a gift for self-promotion. He is a good listener; with some polish he could be a formidable candidate.

Long was born in Chelsea, grew up in Saugus and later attended junior high in East Haddam, Connecticut. He has one sister and a brother in the Air Force. His father was an insurance salesman who founded his own agency in Springfield in 1985.

Instead of finishing high school Tony went to California, where he got his first sales job selling cars. He made a lot of money and stayed there for a year before settling in Springfield to be near his dad. Tony sold cars for numerous dealerships and in 1990 went to work for the Valley Advocate as an ad salesman. After that, he sold insurance for his father.

In 1996 Long was hired as a talk jock by WHMP. At first his show was broadcast weekly but in 1998 he got a full-time, 4 P.M. slot that lasted until his sacking in September.

After the NABC meeting we stopped in the Florence Barber Shop to pick up the keys to the new campaign headquarters; Tony left some stickers and brochures on a table piled with old magazines. Those people, Tony said, referring to some of the elderly men waiting for haircuts, were "his people."

"What's their main beef?" I asked. "Why are they so unhappy with City Hall?"

"They don't feel represented," he said. "There's a lot

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of attention to downtown, a whole lot of attention to select groups, no attention to quality of life, to seniors, the working class, no consideration to those people when it's time to raise taxes or spend money and they're just tired of it."

Tony's headquarters in Florence is in the same building as the Honor Court; "For the Grace of God," reads a big sign on the building's exterior. Inside, Long's new campaign office is peeling, crumbling and reeking of lysol.

"This is ground central, man. The location is awesome," said Tony. "You won't recognize it in a week."

On the way to the Post Office, Tony calls Larry Jones on his cell phone. Jones is the former Northampton fire chief and chairman of Tony's lawn sign committee. They talk about moving supplies to Florence. Tony makes calls to try and locate desks and chairs. He calls campaign chairman Tony Graves.

In the Post Office parking lot Long approaches an elderly woman who is getting into a silver Ford sedan with a Malinofsky sticker on the bumper (Leon Malinofsky failed to make it past the primary). He introduces himself and asks her if she wants a new sticker. She does. I ask if she is going to vote for Tony.

"Don't twist my arm now," she says with a laugh. "Of course."

"Leon did a good job for his first time out," says Tony, being a sport, "but now it's Clare and I."

"Well, he didn't work hard at it," she said. "I don't know whether he wanted even to get in. I was his neighbor on Main Street for eight years, and that's the reason for that."

Tony has one contribution in his P.O. box, a \$10 donation from a Florence resident who apologizes for not being able to send more. "It was nice meeting you at the V.F.W. last Friday when I played Bingo," she wrote.

There's an invitation to a candidate forum sponsored by the *Daily Hampshire Gazette*. Tony had suggested that the candidates be able to question each other, and the *Gazette* agreed.

"If you could ask Clare one question, what would it be," I ask Tony?

He wants to know if she would spend taxpayer money defending in court the City's policy of extending benefits to domestic partners, even though a Domestic Partner Ordinance in Boston was ruled unconstitutional. Northampton voters defeated a similar DPO initiative in 1995, said Long, but the mayor issued an executive order to extend benefits.

His own opposition to benefits for domestic partners has nothing to do with the fact that they are gay, Tony explained. He just thinks the Feds should decide such matters. "If you want the benefits of a married couple, then get married," he said.

"What about gays who can't," I ask?

"Life style issues are not part of my campaign at all," he declared. "It's a policy thing, not an anti-gay thing. Some members of the gay community don't want to listen to the whole story, they just want to label me homophobic."

Tony said he supports the

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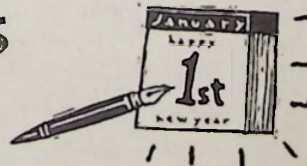
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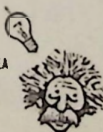
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rights of gays to marry and adopt children, but he also said that he wouldn't fight for those rights, doesn't think gay people should march for those rights and that it isn't the business of the city to adopt policies to provide for those rights.

"You mean you really don't care where people stick their weenies," I ask?

"Well put," Tony says, "as long as it doesn't involve me. I love lesbians. We have a lot in common."

THE regular joe

We head to Tony's house in Hatfield. It is chaotic, with piles of laundry everywhere. The CD collection is diverse; reggae, John Lennon, Fugees, Madonna, jazz. Micky, the wired little dog, is shredding paper and jumping on and off the couch. A computer, boxes of stickers and brochures, articles, forms are on the kitchen table. It's campaign central. Tony asked me not to mention the fact that he is running his campaign from his home in Hatfield — at least until the move to Florence — in order to further the ruse that he is a Northampton resident.

He reads E-mail and fields

calls. He haggles with the telephone company to get phone lines installed in headquarters. He spends an hour in a teleconference call with the Department of Employment and Training, explaining why he is entitled to unemployment benefits from WHMP. Tony says they fired him; they say he resigned. I snooze on the couch. The next day, the DET finds in Tony's favor.

Lunch at Smitty's on Riverside Drive. The combination general store/greasy luncheonette is positively not Main Street; you can get a burger and fries for under \$2.00. It's mostly working guys, in real work clothes. Some reach over the counter to buy lottery tickets. Tony has two cheeseburger specials, shakes a few hands. He pays for my lunch.

We head to the Northampton Nursing home. It's 12:45. Tony calls the *Daily Hampshire Gazette* classified department on his cell phone. He wants an add on page two. He dictates.

"Speed it up, damn farmer," he says to Janet on the other end.

She laughs. "Careful, I'll hang up on you."

"Why should you be any different than your editorial department?" Tony asks.

In the parking lot of the Northampton Nursing Home, Tony eats three breath mints. He has a pocketful of small kaleidoscopes with "Elect Tony Long" printed on them.

There's ten people upstairs in the adult day care center. A big bulletin board hanging on the pink wall says "Happy Birthday to You," noting the September birthdays of residents. The backs of chairs have homemade quilts over them.

"Tony's running for mayor of Northampton," said Betty Thayer, an RN. "He's gonna win too, Jack," she says to a resident.

"Do you think he's gonna win?" Jack asks me.

"Don't ask this guy, he's an intellectual," Tony tells Jack.

Tony hands out the kaleidoscopes. People look through them and yuck it up.

"I really think I am going to win," says Tony. "We are committed to doing this."

"Did you know that I was blinded in one eye in 1972, I got hit in my left eye by a tree?" Jack says. "Did you ever get hit in the head with an oak tree before?"

"Um, just that one my mother was swinging at me," Tony jokes.

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Back in the car, Tony dialed the *Union News*, which reported that day on page one that Joe D'Amour, a lawyer and former gay community liaison to Springfield Mayor Mike Albano, had endorsed Long for mayor. We talk about the needle exchange program. He's against it; junkies shouldn't get free needles when diabetics have to pay for them. It constrains the police department from arresting people for needle possession. He isn't convinced it is effective.

Tony can't reach the *Union News*. The reporter had called Clare Higgins for a comment about the D'Amour endorsement but not Long. Tony is miffed. He won't be appearing much with D'Amour, he said, for fear of alienating his core constituents.

THE MISUNDERSTOOD GENTLEMAN

Saturday morning, October 2. I meet Tony, his wife Tomi, daughter Alex and campaign manager Tony Graves at the Blue Bonnet Diner. We head to headquarters in Florence. There are appearances scheduled at Florence Heights and the Moose Lodge, and there is leafletting to be done.

Things are looking up at headquarters. On two tables, with clean tablecloths, are piles of stickers, brochures, petitions. There are certificates on display from the National Association of the Remodeling Industry, the Red Cross, and from the Massachusetts Broadcasting Association for the best talk show of the year.

I corner Tony Graves, an operations manager at a King Street factory. His family owned Graves Equipment on King Street, he said, until it was destroyed by the Heritage Bank fiasco. His father, who now works as a custodian at Leeds School, just got a pay increase of one percent for the next three years; that won't cut it, Graves said.

He thinks Long has a good chance of winning. "We have 18,000 voters in Northampton," said Graves. "We feel that most of Clare's core group voted in the preliminary. There's 13,000 people that didn't vote. It's our job to persuade them to vote for us."

I ask Graves how Tony can change people's perception of him. "We have to try and get people to understand that was his job," he said. "Look at Howard Stern, Rush Limbaugh. Trying to get ratings they go to extremes. Even on TV, look at David Letterman and Jay Leno. They're busting on everybody. That's not what we are anymore. This is a new agenda. He's now Tony Long the person, not Tony Long the talk show

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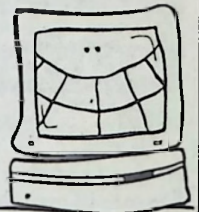
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host."

That's the party line for the fledgling campaign. Long and I address it again. "People have a very difficult time looking at me as a person based upon that comment," he said. "It got so much attention that it was a very polarizing issue, like that's all Tony Long is about. That's absurd."

He denies he's right-wing. "As a talk-show host, the more labels they put on me the better it was," he said, "so I never fought against those labels back then."

"Were those your views that you expressed on the radio?" I asked.

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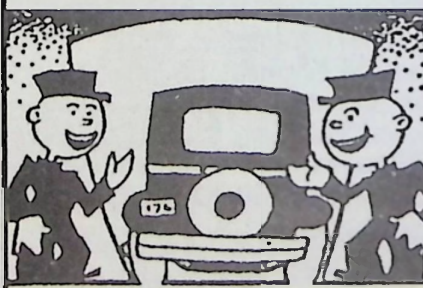
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Tony said yes, absolutely, those were his views. Later that day he gives me a handful of cassette recordings of his shows. One is an interview with David Duke, the Nazi congressional candidate from Louisiana who thinks Jews "deserve to go into the ashbin of history" (Evelyn Rich interview, 2/86), and that blacks "are basically primitive animals" (Wichita, Kansas Sun, 4/23/75).

"For the most part, you're just a greatly misunderstood gentleman," said Long to Duke on April 15, 1999. "The way the media is run it is in their best interest to make you this punching bag."

"I don't think David Duke is relevant at all to this campaign," Tony said bluntly, when I ask him if he stood by his comment. "Are you asking me if I am racist or anti-semitic?"

"No," I say. "I'm asking if you think David Duke is a misunderstood guy."

"I'm not a racist, I am not anti-semitic or homophobic," said Tony. "I don't believe in violence towards women or any other group. That's who I am."

"If that's true," I say, "how can you say David Duke is just a misunderstood guy?"

"I'm not saying that now."

"But you said that then."

"Yeah, I did say that then," said Tony. "My campaign is not about an interview I did with David Duke. My campaign is about who I am."

"Are you saying that nothing you said on the radio is relevant? I don't get it."

"Neither do I," said Tony. "The campaign is about who I am and what I will do for this city."

"Is Duke a racist?"

"I have no personal feelings about David Duke," said Long. "My interest then was to get ratings. What if David Duke just happened to be my best friend. Does that make me a racist? I have racist and homophobic friends. I have anti-semitic friends. I also have black friends and Jewish friends and gay friends. The campaign should be about me rather than who I do and do not associate with."

"But did you mean it when you said it?"

"Who cares what's misunderstood about David Duke?"

"But you defended him on the radio by calling him a misunderstood gentleman."

"I am not defending David Duke. I said it in the context of a talk show host who was interested in getting ratings."

"So you didn't mean it?"

"I don't know if I meant it."

"You don't know if you meant it? Then you said it without thinking?"

"I never put any thought into my talk show," Tony said. "I didn't prep for it. Interviews were booked, I turned on the microphone and interviewed people."

THE CARETAKER

Larry Jones and I are strolling down Main Street in Florence on a glorious Saturday morning; Tony, Tomi and Alex are up ahead. Jones served as fire chief of Northampton for eight years before being fired by Mayor Ford. He is suing the city in Federal Court. Tony stood up for Jones on his program.

"Tony is a young guy I look up to because he is very sure of himself," Jones said. "He is a real nice individual who is very concerned with everybody. He is more informed than Higgins and Ford and a lot of them about city issues and what the people feel."

"What do Tony's people want him to do for them that Ford and Clare Higgins will not do?" I ask.

"Public safety," said Jones. "Ford cut my budget from \$154,000 to \$75,000, which forced me to cut my manpower. The people in Florence and Leeds want good fire and police protection, good roads, and I think they don't want their water and sewer rates continually raised. They have gone overboard on fees for everything. Tony's idea to do a financial audit of where the funds are in this city is great."

At 10:30 A.M. we drop Tomi and Alex off at Smitty's so they can distribute leaflets on Riverside Drive. Tony, Tony Graves and I head to Florence Heights where residents have organized a clean-up of the federally subsidized housing project where 50 families live.

Candace Holbrook, a Florence Heights resident, said that there are three clean-ups per year. Holbrook, 29, is in her second year at Elms College. She plans to study law. She lived in Palmer for many years, where she worked with the Guardian Angels. Holbrook is pregnant with her

fifth child and has known tragedy; in 1990 an 11-month old son was kidnapped off of her porch and was never seen again, she said; in 1994 a young daughter was killed in a Christmas fire.

As we talk Holbrook points out a man she says is a crack dealer from Springfield who is occupying an empty apartment. He threatened her life and vandalized her mother's van when she filed a police report, she said. Holbrook corresponds with Ted Kennedy about children's issues and always votes for him. She doesn't see politics in terms of left versus right; she voted for Long in the primary and will vote for him in November.

"Tony cares," Holbrook said. "Very few politicians have ever come out here and met the people. I called him up and said I wanted him to meet some people and he said he would be here, with no hesitation. We never got a response like that from Mayor Ford or Higgins." (Higgins appeared later that day).

One woman, who has a court-impounded address and did not want to be identified, said that Florence Heights is supposed to have a Community Officer that patrols on a regular basis," she said. "They never come through. It's outrageous. No one comes here. Only Phil Sullivan and Tony."

I count 25 people cleaning up the neighborhood in the warm sunshine; kids, adults, men, women. Tony is raking leaves with gusto. "Where are the people who say they care so much about housing issues?" he asks between breaths. "When it's time to take back the neighborhoods, where are they?"

One small backyard is an overgrown mess. Long and Graves tackle it with rakes, shovels and hoes. People gather nearby, including Phil Sullivan, Ward 5 counselor Alex Ghiselin and his opponent, Marc Hickey. Everyone talks while Tony works non-stop for over an hour until the job is done.

THE HUMAN

My last chance to talk with Tony came on October 15, the day of the odious VMag monthly deadline. I call him at headquarters. He is upset because he's been getting reamed in the press. A Valley Advocate profile made chopped liver out of him and he won't even talk to the Gazette anymore.

"I am just fed up," said Tony. "Every opportunity they get to paint my candidacy in a bad light they have done it. They swore that fact that I called their editor an idiot in your magazine didn't have anything to do with it, but you and I both know that is a load of crap."

"You seem to be having a crisis of confidence," I say. "Where's the swaggering Tony Long of a few weeks ago?"

"I'm getting a little tired," he said. "You are surrounded by such extremes, by people who love you, who say you're Northampton's last hope, then other people cursing. It's impossible to not have those things affect you no matter how tough your skin is. No one wants to be called an asshole by anybody, especially when you know that you're not one."

"Even though you know the

hits are coming, they still hurt," I say.

"I know," said Tony. "I'm human. I know I am not the best choice for mayor but let's face it, it's a job that doesn't pay a lot and it's a job that no one else wants."

Poor Tony. He was so happy as a talk jock, and so qualified for the post.



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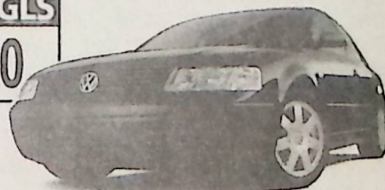


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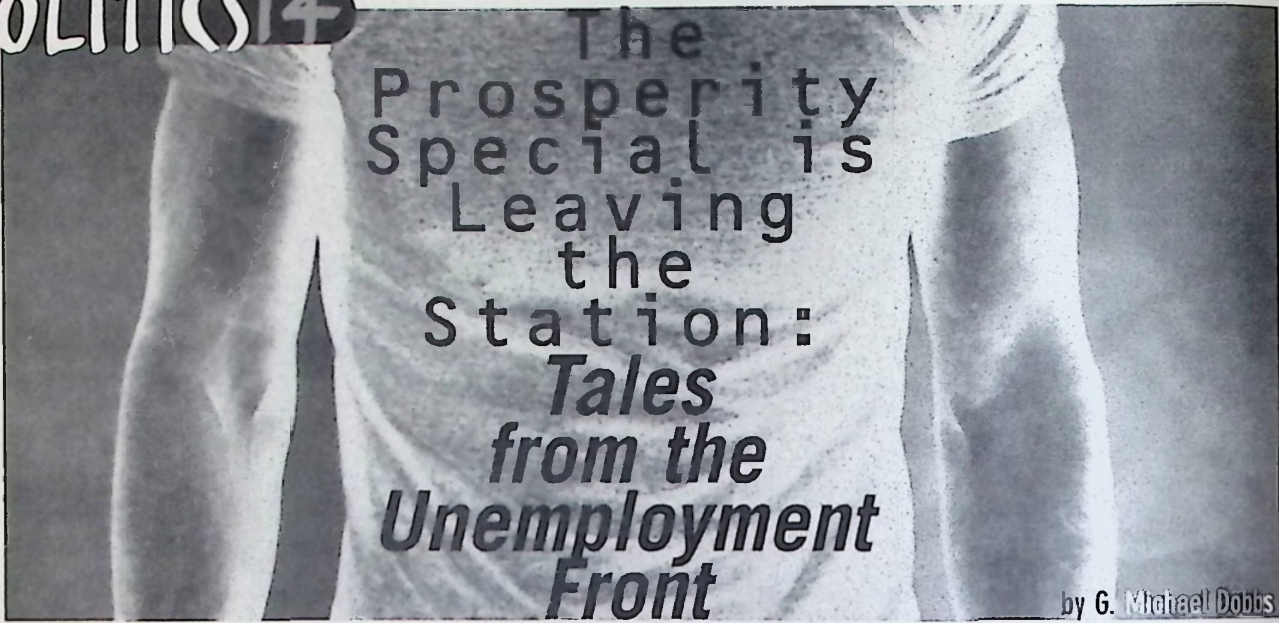
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The Prosperity Special is Leaving the Station: Tales from the Unemployment Front

by G. Michael Dobbs

To look at me you wouldn't think I'm a member of a minority group. After all, I'm a 45 year-old white heterosexual male. According to the state of Massachusetts, though, I'm definitely in the minority.

I'm unemployed and in this day of economic well-being that makes me one of a few. In September, the Division of Employment and Training (DET) announced that the Massachusetts seasonally adjusted unemployment rate dropped from 3.2 percent in July to 3.1 percent in August. For the twelve month period from September 1998 to August 1999, unemployment has averaged 3.1 percent. That's pretty incredible, but there's more good news.

According to DET, "the Massachusetts rate remained 1.1 percentage point lower than the U.S. rate, which also dropped 0.1 percentage point, to 4.2 percent. The Massachusetts rate has been lower than the U.S. rate for 54 consecutive months and has run at least one full percentage point lower during each of

the past fifteen months. Commenting on the latest jobs report, Governor Paul Cellucci said 'This latest drop in unemployment is further evidence that our agenda for economic growth is on track.'"

Happy days are here again.

Now before you dismiss this article as the sour grapes of a burned-out baby boomer, let me just say this is the first time I've been unemployed since 1980. This isn't a habit for me, and up until now I've enjoyed the bulk of my career as a writer, broadcaster, college instructor, and publicist. My problem is that I just haven't been able to hop aboard this economic soul train.

And it's not that I haven't been trying to hitch a ride. Since April when my supervisor called me in for an annual evaluation and dropped the bomb on me, I've been looking for a full-time job. I taught at a local community college during the summer through a grant-funded position and furiously applied for any writing or publicity job I could find. When the teaching position ended I went to FutureWorks in Springfield to use their job-locating resources, and I reluctantly applied for unemployment benefits.

So many of my "days between engagements" have been dedicated to reading want ads, scanning the job listings on the walls of FutureWorks, and asking nearly everyone I know if they've heard of a job.

I hate to contradict the gover-

nor, but I think that most of the people hopping aboard that Prosperity Special aren't riding in the first class seats. Take a look at the classifieds. The majority of jobs are either entry-level or service positions. The DET information confirms this assessment. "The services industry added 2,100 jobs in August, reaching a record high for the seventh consecutive month. Social services, health services, and engineering and management services all recorded solid over-the-month gains. Jobs in the services industry now total 1,164,400, an increase of 27,300 or 2.4 percent from one year ago."

Hey, a job is a job, right? The people who react this way probably can't remember what it was like to make \$10 an hour or less. You see \$10 an hour is just over \$20,800 a year if you work a 40-hour week. If you're paying \$500 a month for rent and \$900 a year for car insurance, that gives you just \$13,900 before taxes. If you're lucky you'll work somewhere where you'll have some sort of health insurance. Too many people aren't that lucky.

Oh sure, you say, those are waitress jobs. I'm afraid you're wrong. Do you know what a social worker makes? Someone with a college degree?

When you're young, single, and willing to have a roommate, these kind of wages can be tolerated. It's all part of paying your dues. When you're older, though, and have a family, a house payment, and two cars in the garage, the prospect is bleak.

Just ask the laundry staff at Baystate Hospital who recently found out that they were all laid off, or talk to the workers at Hamilton Standard who recently got their pink slip. Want more proof of just how cold it is out there? Talk to former Caldor employees.

I suppose my time away from gainful employment colored my views a bit. I'm sure local politicians would call me an obstructionist. I didn't support the casino effort here in my home town of Springfield with its promises of jobs and positive economic growth. The casino would have created a handful of service jobs. About the only people who would have prospered (aside from the casino developers and owners) would be the Springfield police who would have received plenty of extra-duty jobs.

I'm equally pessimistic about the Mayor's plan to rebuild Springfield on the back of baseball. I'm not against sports, but I take a dim view of taking away tax-paying people-hiring businesses and replacing them with a minor league ball park.

I guess I want to know where the old-fashioned real jobs are. Again, according to the DET, "manufacturing followed up a 500 job gain in July with 600 additional jobs in August. It is still too early to know whether the recent increases for this sector represent a change in the trend. However, it is encouraging that Massachusetts manufacturers continued to post job gains in August, whereas nationally, August manufacturing declines wiped out the July gains. Manufacturing jobs in the Bay State are off 11,300 or 2.5 percent since August 1998. Manufacturing industries showing over-the-year increases include: communications equipment; stone, clay and glass; miscellaneous manufacturing; and miscellaneous plastic products."

The DET report continues, "construction remained effectively unchanged in August at 114,100. Although construction jobs are up 5,800 or 5.4 percent since August 1998, employment in this sector has shown little growth during 1999. Construction added 200 jobs in July. Construction jobs are up 6,500 or 6.0 percent since July 1998, but employment in this sector has remained generally level throughout much of 1999."

While I'm sincerely glad so many people are working, I'm concerned with what will happen to this state's economy once a down-turn hits, and I wonder how the politicians will spin that event.

In the meantime, if you're looking for a writer, broadcaster, college instructor, or publicist, with over 20 years experience, contact the editor of this publication. He'll put you in touch with me.

And by the way, I do report my freelance writing earnings to the DET.



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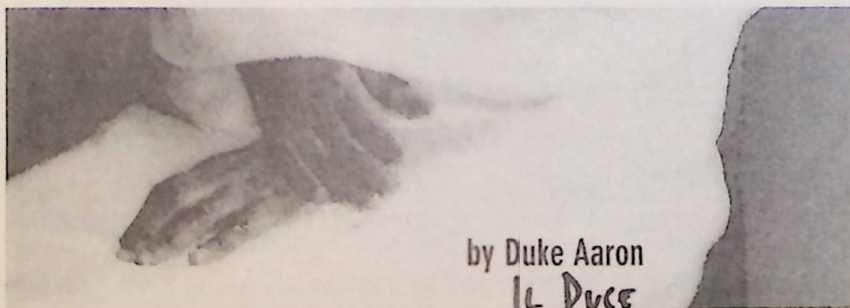
When Michael Lundquist, Executive Director of Transitional Resources, Inc. (TRI), met several years ago with a young girl and her family, he and his colleagues made an interesting discovery. The girl, who wears a prosthetic arm, had a closetful of discarded prostheses that she had outgrown. Looking further into issues surrounding prosthetics in the US, he found that due to some rather strict liability laws, the reuse of prosthetics was strongly prohibited. Meanwhile Central America, and Nicaragua in particular, is in desperate need of prosthetics due to over twenty years of civil war, monumental earthquake damage, and extreme poverty. The damage to Nicaragua's population and Lundquist's US research into prosthetics gave birth to a simple and yet brilliant idea; send used prosthetics from our country to a nation in desperate need.

Lundquist took the problem to his long-time friends Greg Stone (a Northampton artist), Reverend Richard Fournier (Senior Pastor at the Old First

Church in Springfield), and colleague Joe De Fazio (a Northampton Attorney); thus was born Walking United. The mission of Walking United is to establish a long-term sustainable prosthetic clinic in Leon, Nicaragua that is governed and operated by the Nicaraguan community. The clinic will provide high quality prostheses, as well as related medical and physical therapy services, to the poor. Their services will identify, aid, and support psycho-social and other life issues arising from the loss of limbs. Among the organization's primary objectives are: supporting people who are poor in obtaining the necessary prosthetic services to be productive members of their communities; assisting Nicaraguans in developing a sustainable prosthetic program in Leon; working in collaboration with local citizens, government and non-governmental organizations to promote efficient prosthetic services; develop training opportunities for local citizens who have lost limbs; secure adequate funds to create a long-term pros-

thetic clinic; support consciousness raising activities that promote greater understanding and identification with people with disabilities; and to promote cross cultural understanding and awareness of disability issues between citizens from Nicaragua and the United States.

Here in western MA, two programs have been developed as part of Walking United. Shared Steps is a program designed by the Reverend Rich Fournier and serves as a collection center for donated prosthetics. The Reverend has since left Old First Church to devote more time to Walking United, but Shared Steps is still run out of and by Old First Church where the trained volunteers dismantle donated prosthetic limbs into their component parts and prepare the reusable parts for shipment to Nicaragua. Operation First S.T.E.P. (Students and Teachers Exporting Prosthetics) was founded by Belchertown High School teacher Shaun Bresnahan. Their objective is to raise consciousness around the plight of land mine victims around the world. Students are collecting prosthetic components and raising funds to help build the Leon Clinic and train its prosthetic technicians. It is currently estimated that in Nicaragua there are over 4,000 people in need of artificial limbs and over 36,000 people with a wide range of disabilities. Walking United, Transitional Resources, Inc., and the Polus Center for Social & Economic Development, Inc. are working with these and other grassroots organizations, as well as the University of Leon and Leon Hospital, in supporting



by Duke Aaron
IL DUCE

people with disabilities. The clinic in Leon, Walking Unidos, is looking for assistance and funding to train the necessary technicians and provide the services and prosthetics that the people of Nicaragua desperately need.

Walking United has sent several needs assessment trips to Nicaragua in the last several years. Northampton painter and sculptor Greg Stone and Northampton photographer Stephen Petegorsky have traveled there and brought their images of everyday life — showing us the horror of landmines and bringing us closer to people with disabilities. From information on the internet, people across the US have donated close to 200 prosthetic devices, valued at over \$230,000. In collaboration with Mercy Ships, a missionary church group, Walking United was able to make two trips to Nicaragua in 1998, bringing with them more than \$135,000 worth of prosthetic parts. In August of that year they made a third trip bringing about \$100,000 value of components. The estimated cost of running the Walking Unidos clinic in Leone is about \$200,000 a year and local community fund-raisers are being scheduled.

Nicaragua is the poorest nation in Central America. The unemployment rate hovers at 60%. The average annual income for a working class Nicaraguan family is \$370.00 US dollars and the cost of a prosthetic limb in Nicaragua ranges from \$500.00 to \$2,000.00 US dollars. To help imagine the cost of prosthetic component parts, you should know that a small travel bag can carry over \$50,000 US dollars worth of components. Without Walking United and its associates the idea of providing prosthetic limbs for family members in need becomes improbable at best. The following letter was originally published in the Old First Church's newsletter, *The Rooster*;

Dear People at Old First Church,

Maybe you won't remember who I am, but I am the niece of Roberto Latour who came to you with a request for prosthetic leg to send to Cuba. Well I am that young lady who, thanks to you and my uncles, was able to walk again 10 months after having my leg amputated.

There is a saying that you don't know what you have until you lose it. And it is true. When I lost my leg, I did not only lose a part of my body, but also my dreams. So you see, you have not only helped to restore a part of my body, but also my optimism, my faith, and my hopes. I'm now able to resume my medical practice and help others.

I will always be grateful. If there is anything I can do to help you or your church, please let me know. Consider me a dedicated friend for life.

If one day I have the privilege to see God face-to-face, I would only ask Him that my family and people like you at Old First Church would have lots of health and to keep you always in his radiant love.

Thank you,

- Dr. Betty Ojeda Torres

A letter like that, combined with Petegorsky's photographs, Greg Stone's sculptures, paintings, and drawings, the devotion of volunteers, and the leadership of individuals like Rev. Fournier, Joseph De Fazio and Shaun Bresnahan, bring the situation to a more lively and human understanding. Beyond cost projections, and what comes down to the business of helping people, are the people themselves.

On a similar, and decidedly last minute, note: contacting your legislators on issues like this and related topics, such as the plan to forgive third world debt, is important. They listen more than you would think and our voices need to be, and should be, heard.

For more information and how to contribute time or resources contact: Transitional Resources, Inc., (508) 752-3271 / MLTRI@aol.com; "Shared Steps" Old First Church, (413) 7371411;

Reverend Richard Fournier, rtfournier@aol.com.

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INACTIVE

SO YOU WANNA BE AN ACTIVIST?



by Roscoe

smith

National and local politics seem like a huge deep swamp:

dense, thick and impenetrable. For many Joe and Jane Americans, we feel that the inhabitants of this swamp - congressmen, presidents, mayors, etc., are mostly what swamp creatures tend to be: slimy. And, if an inhabitant isn't slimy upon entering this swamp, they will inevitably become another slimy political creature since one can't live in the swamp and stay dry.

I don't know if there is a week that doesn't go by where I don't hear someone make a comment or complaint that can't be summed up in a simple phrase: "I hate what is going on in the government, and there's nothing I can do about it." I sometimes hear this on a daily basis. I hear it about national as well as local issues, and not just about the soap-opera nature of our president's sex life, but about everything from why they won't put a traffic light on the corner of Trumbull and State

ACTIVE

streets in Northampton, to why we're spending money crashing space probes onto the surface of Mars.

I frequently feel frustrated myself about what I read in the paper or watch on television news (how I react to the sensationalistic nature of TV news may be part of my problem). Recently, however, I reached some type of boiling point: it wasn't even an issue that was national in nature or local to the area where I live. The issue was Mayor Giuliani of New York City and his reactions toward the now famous "Sensations" art show at the Brooklyn Museum of Art.

I didn't have a problem with his vocalizing his dislike, but when he withheld payments from the city to the museum and began eviction proceedings, I felt myself angered at his breach of the First Amendment. I then heard that a particular piece that he had held up as sacrilegious — a painting of a black Madonna with an exposed breast made of elephant dung — was created by a man born in Nigeria. This is a significant piece of information because in Nigeria, elephant dung is a symbol of fertility. Giuliani's ignorance, coupled with the fact that he never viewed these pieces himself, put me over the edge (First Amendment issues being a particularly sore point with me).

So, I did something that I've never done before. I E-mailed Mayor Giuliani (giuliani@www.ci.nyc.ny.us). I had never E-mailed or written letters to a politician before, because I truly believed that when it came to political issues, "There's nothing I can do." I had always believed that it was important to have your voice heard by the people you put into power, but I had also felt that my one voice wouldn't really make much difference, let alone be heard. (I mean, does Clinton actually sit down and personally read all of his E-mails?) What I realized was that, no, Clinton probably did not read all of his E-mails, *but someone did* and they must record reactions to certain issues to stay on top of future voters' bug-a-boos. And, there are probably politicians at lower levels of government who do read their letters and E-mails, and maybe even a few who respond to them.

Now, I didn't expect Mayor Giuliani to reply to my E-mail. However, to someone who is obviously sizing himself up for national politics, I wanted him to know that there were voters outside of New

York City that were pissed off enough to fire off an E-mail and give him a piece of their mind.

After taking this action I realized that I had, on some level, dipped my toe into the pool of activism. Activism! Was I becoming an activist?

Activism, especially here in the Pioneer Valley, is a term with a lot of weight behind it. Images of Birkenstock-wearing, granola-eating folk who devote every moment of their lives to their cause: something all-involving that happened in the Sixties. No time for activism in today's busy, frenetic world.

Let me give you The American Heritage College

Dictionary definition of activism:

"the doctrine or practice of assertive, often militant action, such as strikes, as a means of achieving political or social goal." Even this definition carries some weight — "militant."

However, I encourage you to focus on only one of the words: "assertive." Assertive action can be activism. Instead of complaining and feeling powerless over political issues one can take an assertive action. One doesn't have to devote an entire life to a cause: one *can* overcome the inertia of just letting decisions get made without having a voice in them (even if one recoils from the term activism).

I decided to undertake a mini-course in simple activism (no, not quitting my job and volunteering on a Greenpeace boat). My research was brief and admittedly limited, but it gave me a sampling of actions that are simple and effective. Perhaps these ideas may seem too simple to some, or too obvious to others, nevertheless:

1. Stay informed. Read the paper. This is better than watching the news on television as newspapers are generally more in-depth. Read both a local paper and a national paper. Many Sunday or weekend editions of newspapers have a summary of the news from the previous week and can be read slowly over the next seven days.

2. Vote. Vote national and vote local. The percentage of voters in recent past elections has been abysmal. Well under 50% of eligible voters vote in many local elections. This is one place that your voice gets the most bang — by keeping or getting rid of the people who make the big decisions. —>

CURIOSITY

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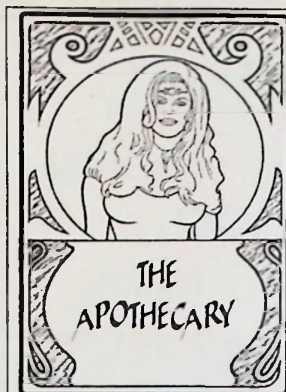
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3. Write a letter or E-mail. Make politicians accountable by speaking to them directly. You don't have to write a long, well-thought out essay. Simply saying, "I don't agree with the 'blah, blah bill' so please don't vote for it," is direct and to the point. To find out who your national senator is and what his/her postal and E-mail addresses are go to: www.senate.gov. For your national representative: www.house.gov. And for the big cheese himself: president@whitehouse.gov. For your local state senators and representatives: www.state.ma.us/legis/citytown.htm (Massachusetts); www.cit.state.vt.us/ (Vermont); www.state.ct.us/ (Connecticut).

4. Attend a local City Council or committee meetings. Call your local City Hall and ask them when they hold City Council meetings and what committees are made up of local citizens (for example, the Amherst Public Art Commission). This involves a bit more time and energy, but it is a place where your voice can have the most direct result. The meetings tend to be small, so your involvement can have a more immediate impact.

5. Do your own research. A simple search on the internet or a few well-placed phone calls can get you the information you want. An example of this is how I found out about local City Council and committee meetings. I chose an issue in my community (Northampton) that I thought I might want to have a voice in: the proposal to tax (via permitting) tag sales. The proposal to tax tag sales is in response to what some people feel is an abuse of the privilege of having tag sales on your property by people who have tag sales every weekend or every day and have thus created a "business" on their property. I called City Hall and asked the person who answered about getting involved in the decision-making process. This

person seemed eager to give me information, perhaps because not many citizens call to ask how they can get involved. I was told that the tag sale issue was not an ordinance yet, which meant that it isn't being explored in a committee. I was told I could go to the Northampton City Council meeting and bring my concern to them. The Council is made up of the mayor and all the City Councilors and meets on the first and third Thursdays of the month at 7:45 pm (times vary with each community). And, if the issue became an ordinance it would then go the Ordinance Committee which meets the second Tuesday of every month at 7 pm. One can find the times and agendas for the next month's meetings, I was told, on the bulletin board right inside City Hall.

"Activism is good" — say this to yourself several times. Sure, I could give you the old line "If everyone spoke up then change would happen." However, I believe it's true: if everyone voted and everyone spoke up on issues that they have an opinion on, then I'm sure that modern day politics would be, at least, a bit different, if not radically altered.

Me, I'm tired of sucking it up every time I hear about some political action that concerns or angers me. I'm sure that Mayor Giuliani isn't too concerned with the opinion of some guy in Northampton, Massachusetts, but given his national political ambitions, you never know. And — seriously — that five minutes of time I spent writing that E-mail not only made me feel better but it empowered me to make those first tentative steps towards more active involvement: had I not E-mailed Rudy I probably wouldn't have called City Hall regarding the tag sale permitting issue and had I not called City Hall then I wouldn't have attended my first City Council meeting where I learned that each meeting opens with time allotted for the public to address the Council and Mayor.

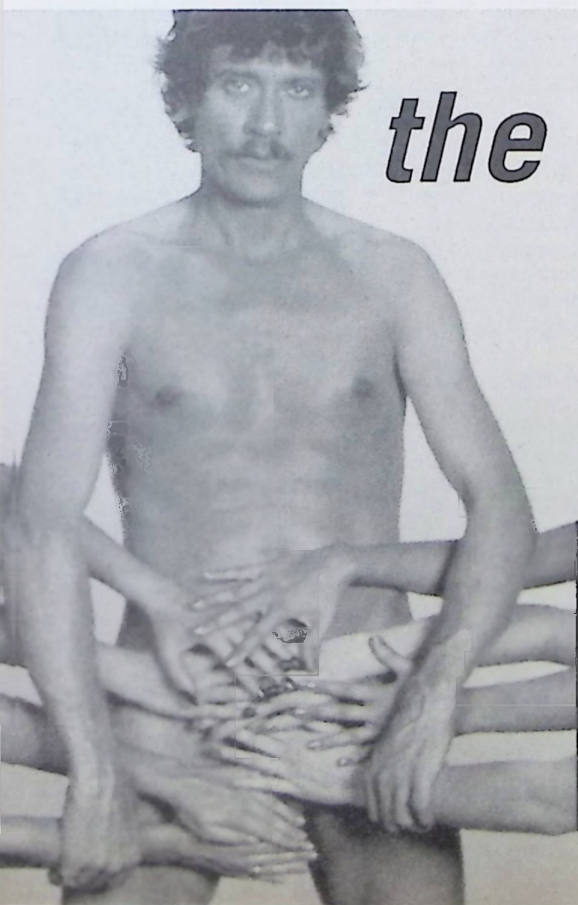
Imagine that:
I speak and they listen.

NORTHAMPTON FILM FESTIVAL

Get ready to spend November 3-7 downtown in the dark.

Now in its fifth year, the **Northampton Film Festival** promises movie buffs close to non-stop viewing for five straight days and nights. A screening committee of local and Boston film professionals has winnowed down more than 500 entries to 60-plus of the best features, shorts and docs floating around the indie world. Here's the low-down on what's **hot**, what's **cool** and what's *what*.

First: an overview. What's unique about Northampton's Festival is the range of offerings and events. This year NFF will feature North American premieres of a ground-breaking set of films from East Germany. Back again are the Jewish series, gay/lesbian entries, a New England premiere silent film performance by the Alloy Orchestra, a Filmmakers Forum and a staged reading of a movie-related play, *THE INTERVIEW*. Plus: movies for kids, and for seniors; a screening of Taiwanese-American director Ang Lee's (*SENSE & SENSIBILITY*, *THE ICE STORM*) latest feature, *RIDE WITH THE DEVIL*; and finally, a new Errol Morris documentary and a specially selected sneak preview to close the Festival Sunday night -- **Kevin Smith's DOGMA!**



NFF

by Brooks Robards

Co-founders and directors Dee DeGeiso and Howard Polonsky troll most of the nationally known film events from Sundance and Telluride to Toronto and Nantucket. They know what's out there. Unlike biggies such as Sundance, Toronto and Nantucket that are geared for distributors looking to buy, DeGeiso and Polonsky have tried to fashion their event after Telluride. That means a laid-back atmosphere where movie fans, wannabe moviemakers and professionals can mingle comfortably.

"It's a place for filmmakers to have a forum and the general public to have a chance to see films they wouldn't be able to see elsewhere," says DeGeiso.

What's hot this year at the Festival is a rare set of films from the former East Germany. They represent a selection of works made before the Wall came down at state-run DEFA (Deutsche Film-Aktiengesellschaft), along with a compilation of underground films from the same period. NHH collaborated with Barton Byg, Director of the DEFA Film Library at UMass, Noho-based IceStorm International, and the Massachusetts International Festival of the Arts to bring these films to the Festival. Some will go on to tour internationally.

Headlining the East German offerings is a re-release of 1977 Foreign Film Oscar nom **JACOB THE LIAR**, starring Armin Mueller-Stahl (*THE X-FILES: THE MOVIE*, *THE GAME*, *SHINE*). By coincidence, a Hollywood version of *JACOB* featuring Robin Williams is currently making the rounds of commercial theatres. The NHH original *JACOB* will feature a new print, with new subtitles and an appearance by director Frank Byer. Mueller-Stahl was also scheduled to show up, but had to cancel at the last minute because of a new movie commitment. The first film out of DEFA's studios to deal with the German treatment of Jews, *JACOB* tells the story of a man who overhears on a Nazi radio information about the war. He tells his ghetto neighbors Russians troops are coming to their rescue, and bolstered by his claim of owning a radio, his news spreads hope like wildfire. **Wednesday, November 3, Academy of Music, 2pm (98 minutes).**

Connoisseurs of camp will relish **THE SONS OF GREAT BEAR**. This spaetzle —aka German spaghetti western— tells its story from the Native American perspective. *GREAT BEAR* launched a series of "Indianerfilms" that were smash hits in East Germany. Starring a Yugoslav gym teacher, they were shot in what is now Serbia. **Saturday, November 6, McConnell Hall, 1pm (93m).** →

LOW DOWN

ON NOHO'S OWN

FILM FESTIVAL

More recent DEFA films to be screened include the 1990 documentary **THE WALL** by Jurgen Bottcher, and **NIGHT SHAPES** by Andreas Dresen. Michael Gwisdek just won Best Actor at the Berlin Film Festival for his **NIGHT SHAPES** role. **WALL** director Bottcher will attend the screening of his film. Also not to be missed are the rarely shown compilation of underground films by **Klaus Loser**. These were made without government approval. **WALL: Thursday, November 4, Academy of Music, 9:30pm (99m); NIGHT SHAPES: Thursday, November 4, Academy of Music, 6 pm introduction, 7pm screening, (104m); underground films Saturday, November 6, McConnell Hall 3:30 pm (90m).**

The coolest (hottest?) film at the festival has to be **WADD: THE LIFE AND TIMES OF JOHN C. HOLMES**, by Emerson grad Cass Paley. Holmes was the porn king notorious for his 13-inch appendage. The multi-award-winning commercial film **BOOGIE NIGHTS** by Paul Thomas Anderson was based on Holmes's life. For the first 45 minutes, Paley's **WADD** gives a rundown on the porn industry, showing what goes on behind the scenes, and then explains how Holmes got into the business. Without pandering to its audience, the documentary displays what made Holmes famous and moves from his childhood in rural Ohio to his death from AIDS. **Saturday, November 6, Center for the Arts, 8 pm (120m); nudity, sex scenes.**

Other cool picks include **THE CORNDOG MAN**, **RADIATION** and **THE INVISIBLES**. Festival Best Feature Winner **CORNDOG** tells the story of a Southern boat salesman named Ace Barker, who is subjected to a series of harassing phone calls. Madness sets in before long, and his redneck life of fishing, eating and selling boats ends forever. Director Andrew Shea graduated from Hampshire College, and his first feature, **SANTA FE**, starring Gary Cole and Lolita Davidovich, was screened at Sundance. **CORNDOG** star Noble Willingham is running for Congress in Texas this year. For the first time this year, NFF will hold a screening in **Springfield at the Eastfield Mall Showcase Cinemas Wednesday, November 3, 7 pm**, as well as at the **Academy of Music Friday,**

November 5, Academy of Music, 9:45 pm (83m). The Eastfield Mall Showcase Cinemas are the only area theatres with stadium seating.

RADIATION's co-director Michael Galinsky (sharing credit with Suki Hawley) is best known on the music scene as the bassist for Sleepyhead. This movie follows the story of Unae Fresno, tour manager for the Spanish label Radiation, who books American Indie bands in Spain. Offering an inside view of the indie music scene, it features the bands Lotusland and Spacehead. Wife/husband team Hawley and Galinsky first collaborated on **HALF-COCKED**, a documentary about an indie rock band touring the South, and they play together in the band Drop Ceiling. Hawley has also worked for Roger Corman and on such films as **KIDS**, **SENSE & SENSIBILITY** and **PARTY GIRL**; Photographer-musician Galinsky has directed music videos. **Saturday, November 6, Academy of Music, 1 pm (90m).**

Kurt Cobain's life provides the inspiration for **THE INVISIBLES** by Noah Stern. Shot in black and white, this fiction film looks on as a rock musician and a fashion model (with no resemblance to Courtney Love) hole up together in a Paris room. Like Cobain, the movie's musician is on the lam from a rehab center. The two try to come to terms with their drug addiction, and the movie has much to say about the underlying causes of addiction and the commodification of artists. Stern, who teaches screenwriting in the UCLA Writers' Program, has formed his own production company, ZHFFilms, concentrating on indie film projects. **Saturday, November 6, Stoddard Hall, 5:30 pm (89m).**

Here's the pick of the rest by day.

On **Friday, November 5**, three of the shorts scheduled for **4 pm** at the Academy of Music, **DIGITAL GREMLIN FOR WINDOWS**, **RADIANT FLUX** and **SPORTING DOG**, deserve a viewing. By using stop-action animation, Chris Clements demonstrates in **DIGITAL GREMLIN** (3m) what it takes to make a computer work. In **RADIANT FLUX** (31/2m), Dartmouth College professor David Ehrlich works with animation to create waves of energy. The basis for **SPORTING DOG** (22m) is an unusual bet that

could save the hero from destruction. Screenwriter and producer James Schamus will introduce Ang Lee's **RIDE WITH THE DEVIL** at the **Academy of Music, 6:45 pm (136m).** The Civil War drama represents his latest collaboration with the celebrated Asian-American director and is having its East Coast premiere.

on **Saturday, Nov. 6**, **AMERICAN HOLLOW** will be screened in Wright Hall at **1 pm**. Rory Kennedy, youngest daughter of the late Robert F., is the director of this documentary on the life of an Eastern Kentucky Appalachian family. **HOLLOW (90m)** won the Festival's Advocate Newspapers Award for Best Documentary. If the porn industry and **WADD** don't grab you, you can attend the regional premiere of playwright Faye Sholiton's Holocaust play, **THE INTERVIEW**, starring Marilyn Chris. As well as performing extensively on Broadway, Chris played Wanda on the TV soap *One Life To Live*. The staged reading, which is directed by Rena Down, will be held in the **Academy of Music at 8 pm**, the same time as **WADD** screens at the Center for the Arts.

On **Sunday**, the Alloy Orchestra does its silent-movie thing with shorts from Buster Keaton, Charlie Chaplin and Laurel & Hardy at the **Academy of Music, 1 pm**. Make an afternoon of it by catching **TRUE FANS** and **A HERO FOR DAISY** in **Stoddard Hall at 3:30 pm**. **FANS (41m)** documents a 100-day bike tour from Los Angeles to the Basketball Hall of Fame in Springfield. **DAISY (42m)** tells the story of a Yale crew member who spearheads a protest against inferior facilities for women athletes.

Sunday evening November 7 is the night for Errol Morris's (**FAST, CHEAP & OUT OF CONTROL**, **A THIN BLUE LINE**) latest documentary. This one's about an autistic professor who designs more humane slaughterhouses. It's followed by a sneak preview of Kevin Smith's highly anticipated **DOGMA**, "the story of a female descendant of Jesus who is called upon by a formerly unknown 13th apostle to prevent two cast out angels from undoing all of God's work." With Matt Damon, Ben Affleck and Linda Fiorentino. This is the film Miramax/Disney got cold feet over. **Academy of Music, 8:15 pm.**

PLUG:

NOTHING'S CHANGED

Then, there's the party stuff. Silverscape Designs will host a dinner reception featuring food and drink from a variety of Noho restaurants on **Wednesday, November 3, 4-6 pm.** It's free for anyone with a ticket to the Jewish Film Series or a Full Festival Pass. Tickets and passes available at the door. On Friday, November 4, the Northampton Center for the Arts will provide the locale for the Weekend Kick-off Party at 5 pm. Tickets for this event, where you can schmooze with filmmakers, are \$10 if you don't have a Festival pass. You can attend an artists' reception at Michelson's Galleries on Saturday, November 5, at 10 pm. for \$10. The reception will honor all participating filmmakers and special guests, and Festival awards will be presented.

Don't forget the **Filmmaking Forum** at the Northampton Center for the Arts on Sunday, November 7 at 9:30 am. Producer and Screenwriter James Schamus (THE ICE STORM, THE WEDDING BANQUET) headlines a discussion of production design, followed by a second forum at 11 am for which the topic is still to be decided. Featured in addition to Schamus are designers Patrizia von Brandenstein, Stuart Wurtzel, Stephen Marsh and Vanessa James. The cost is \$6.

If you're a true blue movie fanatic, you won't stop with these selections. "There were so many more good films that we wanted to accept," says DeGeiso. "There were at least enough for two festivals from the films submitted." What does the future hold for the Festival? Possibly a full week of screenings, with plenty more films and multiple showings of the same movies. "We'd like to see the whole town involved" says Polonsky.

Festival Headquarters is at the Northampton Center for the Arts. Tickets for most events can be purchased at the Northampton Box Office (1-800-THE-TICK). For further information on events, call **586-3471.**

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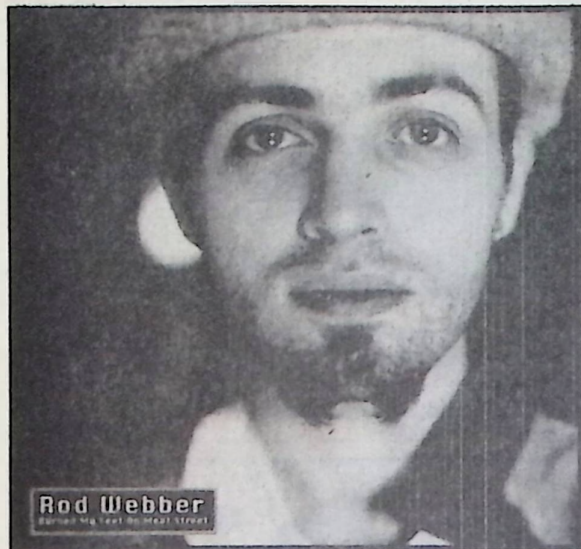
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ROD WEBBER
BURNED MY FEET ON
MEAT STREET
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Rod Webber's new disc, **Burned My Feet On Meat Street**, is a compelling dissection of contemporary music technology. With a ten-track mix of tunes that remind one of **Cookie Puss**-era Beastie Boys or Beck if he was a tad more adventurous, Webber's low-key, low-tempoed art-hop captivates and interests. He weaves the loops and samples into a truly interesting post-modern orchestra of sound. His lyrics border more on the East Village poet, than showing his suburban Needham, MA roots and if you've ever been to Needham then you would know that this is a good thing (wealthy and white). Hints of Beatles and just about everything recorded since (can you say "Disco Inferno?") pop-up to slide a textured layer of coolness in between the technology and the man.

Having bumped around in different projects from Brooklyn to upstate NY and finally back to Mass, he is currently resurrecting the old Alien Skin band and playing solo stuff at Cambridge mainstays like T.T.s and The Middle East. It seems that Rod has had his hand in just about every kind of musical adventure since an arrest stuck him in the area and the authorities required his presence (which he graciously accepted). From scoring and producing the music for a performance art theater, to solo projects to bands, he is putting out some great projects. **Burned My Feet On Meat**

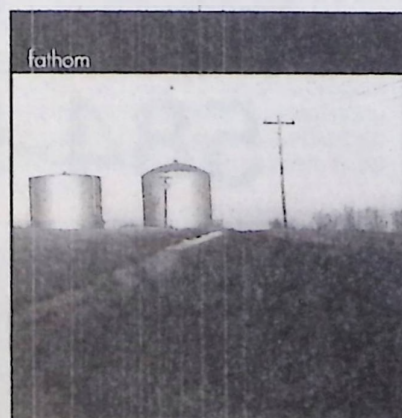
Street shows a young musical artist with tons of talent and ideas.

Of particular note are: "Killing Me," an old-school blast; title song "Burned My Feet On Meat Street," serving up a twisted version of da' funk (with monk-like monotone chanting); "Black Sheets," which conjures up a mix of Beck and 3RD Bass' better efforts; "Left Unsaid," entering into a more ambient avenue than the rest of the disk; and "Edna St. Vincent (El Camino Remix)," an absolute mind-blower: Webber, with help from DJ Deaf Meadow, pulled out all the stops on this one.

Layer upon layer sheets through the song, giving the listener an almost religious sense of future-world fantasy. Can't wait to hit him up for more stuff. I hope he makes some Valley appearances soon, as he would certainly grab a good fan base out here.

You can check him out at:
www.psychicaudio.com or
happypsychos@hotmail.com.

- Duke Aaron
 Il Duce

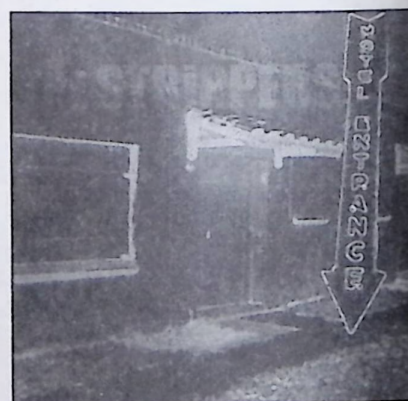


FATHOM
Self-released CD

A four song ep from Amherst's Fathom is a mixed bag. Vocals and guitar duties are traded off between Dan St. Louis and John Mello and the line-up goes on to include: Joe Mello on guitar, Matt Winslow on bass, and Jeremy Seale on drums. Track one, "Deliverance," and

track three, "Broken Windows," are good tunes slightly marred by slick production and Dan St. Louis' voice that ranges from a late-eighties metal smooth to an early-nineties Seattle extendo-range. Track two, "Nearsighted," and track four, "Hours," fair better. The production is still a little over-done but Jon Mello's vocals have an interesting rawness. Still, all said and done this is a good first outing for any band and the musicianship is excellent. Fathom is proof positive that the Valley is spawning some impressive new and decidedly heavy bands. There is a lot of bottom-end power on these four songs and some serious talent. I might be wrong, but I think one of the Mello brothers might be a guy I met a few years ago: a friend of the second front-man for the semi-legendary project Flatboy. For more info on Fathom check out Fathom@apexmail.com or [//members.xoom.com/FathomMusical](http://members.xoom.com/FathomMusical).

- Duke Aaron
 Il Duce



THE STRIPPERS
AT THE HELL MOTEL
Self-released CD

Like a raging case of herpes, the six... er... seven tracks on **At The Hell Motel** spread some old-school metal mixed with a certain punk abandon. Song titles say a lot about the band and their music: "Bitch," "mothereagansleazeball," "The Strip," "Whorehouse," "Lie Nothing," "Car Crash," and the uncredited seventh "mystery track." These Valley-ites, Ben, Buddy Holiday, and Mr. Fantastic, brew up a sound that ranges from Sabbath blues to today's metal-core psychos. The CD is well produced and stays out of the over production that plagues most of the bands in the post-Staind Valley; not surprising considering it was produced and mastered by Mark

Allen Miller at Slaughterhouse. The songs, though, are a bit too long: the hooks and choruses are great the first few times you hear them, but after awhile a little boredom sets in and this could have been weeded out easily. Long, fairly repetitive jam parts work live, but fail on recordings (with some exceptions of course). Even considering this limitation, the song themes and lyrics are winners. The disc realizes its full potential with the rapid-fire attack of "Car Crash" and the belated reprise on track seven. "Bitch" and "Whorehouse" are the other tunes to note here, but I would probably check The Strippers out live before I bought a disc. For more info check the band out at www.thestripers.com. If, however, you are not sick, depraved, nor slightly lunatic, well then just forget about it. Alright.

- Duke Aaron
Il Duce



PAULA COLE BAND
AMEN
Imago/Warner Bros.

Well, I have to admit that there are a couple of tunes on Paula Cole's new album **Amen** that don't totally suck. **Amen** is her third album ('94's debut, **Harbinger** and the ubiquitous '96 release, **This Fire**) and strays into some new territory, while remaining mundanely mainstream. This album presents nine uplifting, spiritual, and way over-produced songs destined to land her in line for more Grammy's. Her last release got seven nominations and she is the first woman to ever win Producer of the Year. I'm sure everybody remembers the tune "Where Have All The Cowboys gone?" and of course "I Don't Want To Wait," which just so happens to be the theme to **Dawson's Creek**. With all this I think VMag's publisher, Murphy, gave me this

disc as some sort of punishment for busting his girlfriend's laptop computer. Maybe I'm just paranoid. I don't know. Paula and her band, Jay Bellerose on drums, Kevin Barry on guitars, are all Berklee grads and the dullness and lack of any risk taking in the songs, recording, and production painfully bear this out. Perhaps I'm being cynical. I mean, she has to be good: she performed for the troops during Desert Storm and has even appeared on **Regis & Kathie Lee**, as well as other big money talk shows. Paula lists influences like Dolly Parton, Annie Lenox, Kate Bush, and Peter Gabriel. She also says that she, Kevin, and Jay are all rooted in black music. Black music? Huh? If she means music made by or derived from people of African descent, well, just about everything is black music. It seems like a bit of a broad genre to be citing, if you ask me. In her defense, she does have a history in gospel and has authenticated Amen with appearances by T-Boz of TLC and Gang Starr's DJ Premier. It is definitely nice to see such love "symbolically unifying black and white" (a quote from Paula in her press release, really).

The stand-out tunes here are "I Believe In Love," "La Tonya," and "Rhythm Of Life." Unsurprisingly these are all tunes that rely to a greater or lesser degree on gospel and hip hop influences ("I Believe In Love" and "Rhythm Of Life" are the two songs with DJ Premier). It took a little getting used to hearing Paula Cole rappin' to the homeys, but she pulls it off and shows some real promise in her ability to mix genres. Her lyrics are well written and, except when she goes overboard on the peace and love stuff, poignant and superbly crafted. Unfortunately three songs don't make an album and "Pearl," "Be Somebody" (with T-Boz), and "God Is Watching" are all just a little too preachy and/or sunshine filled. "Amen," "Free," and "Suwannee Jo" fair better, the first two being somewhat reminiscent of the stuff on her last two releases, while "Suwannee Jo" has a gritty, urban, LA-meets-bayou texture to it that makes you feel as if Paula was listening to Tom Waits a lot when she wrote it. It won't be a hit, but is the song here that should impress the most people in the long term.

Paula Cole is a native of Rockport, MA and was educated, as I said above, at Boston's famous musician processing center, Berklee College of Music.

- Duke Aaron
Il Duce



KÍLA
TÓG É GO BOG É
Green Linnet

From time to time, even the most vibrant styles of music bear witness to a totally fresh approach, an act that manages to stay true to tradition, yet create something new in the process. Such a phenomenon are Dublin's Kíla. Though they've been around Ireland for about ten years (and several are members of Dead Can Dance) and have a previous CD (1995's **Mind The Gap**, on Key Records but unavailable here in the US), **Tóg É Go Bog É** has become something of a sensation here in the last few months. The success is well deserved. No one I've heard has been able to integrate so many influences from around the world yet still sound 100% Irish. Yes, Afro-Celt Sound System and many others have touched upon it, but these guys fairly drip with Irish soul.

The title means "Take It Easy" but most of this album follows different advice. With the exception of a couple of meandering ballads like the sublimely melancholy "Jasmine," the tunes are rather energetic. There's plenty of music for the dance floor, and the material is more or less evenly split between vocals and instrumentals. The playing is marvelous with lots of improvisation but, thanks to Rónán Ó Snodaigh's inspired lead vocals, a fully rounded experience is achieved. He has what must surely be the most distinguished voice in Celtic music today; at times there is an almost hip-hop cadence to it (making hip-hop sounding almost like it was invented in Ireland... maybe it was). Rónán's joined by brothers Colm on flute and Rossa on bazouki, as well as Lance Hogan on guitars, Brian Hogan on bass, Dee Armstrong on fiddle and accordion, and Eoin Dillon on Uillain pipes and tin whis-

tle. I found myself transfixed with the tender "Crann Na bPingini" and "Double Knuckle Shuffle," the latter with its ultra smooth groove. Standouts include "Ó Taubh Tuathail Amach," which takes a bit of its spice from reggae with skanking horn arrangements and DJ style vocalizations, and "Rusty Nails," which is almost klezmer in flavor, showcasing Dee Armstrong's fiddle journeying from the shtetl to the pub and back effortlessly. The title cut is a bare bones affair, just vocals and percussion, that imparts the exotic feel of Jamaican "nyabingi" chants. The disc ends with a slow number, "Tip Toe," the only track sung in English.

Already a big hit overseas, Kila have hit our shores with a landmark release. Between Ó Snoddáig's unique voice and a willingness to play a bit with tradition, this will be one of those recordings that will be pointed to as a true, groundbreaking original.

(Green Linnet Records, 43 Beaver Brook Road, Danbury CT 06810)

- Meathook Williams



CHRIS CONNOR
WARM COOL:
THE ATLANTIC YEARS
KENNY BURRELL
KENNY BURRELL: 12-15-78
RAHSAAN ROLAND
KIRK / YUSEF LATEEF
SEPARATE BUT EQUAL
RAHSAAN ROLAND KIRK
LEFT HOOK, RIGHT CROSS
VARIOUS ARTISTS
JAZZ THAT SWINGS

Joel Dorn at 32 Jazz has been a busy man, reissuing many of the classic recordings of the 50's, 60's and 70's from the Atlantic and Muse catalogues. Much of this music he was involved with as a producer for Atlantic during this period.

Chris Connor recorded 12 albums for Atlantic Records between 1956 and 1962. She was associated with jazz's west coast "cool school." Often compared to Anita O'Day and June Christie, she was willing to try more adventurous material. Connor's voice has a special quality and particular sound. Her detached "cool" vocals and ability to improvise overcome her somewhat limited range. For **Warm Cool**, producer Dorn enlisted author Will Friedwald and Chris to select 40 cuts from the 12 albums. What emerged is an extraordinary compilation of her work that shows why she was one of the most popular jazz singers of the 50's. She is accompanied by numerous jazz legends including Clark Terry, Phil Woods, Maynard Ferguson, Chano Pozo, Milt Hinton, Lucky Thompson and Al Cohn. Highlights include "Strike Up The Band" which kicks off disc one of this two-disc set, "All the Things You Are," featuring Jaki Byard, "Lonely Woman" by Ornette Coleman, and Leiber and Stoller's "Kansas City." On disc two listen to "Summertime" featuring a Maynard Ferguson solo, and a Latin take on "Misty".

Kenny Burrell 12-15-78 is a compilation of Muse releases Live at the Village Vanguard and Kenny Burrell In New York, both recorded at the same concert in December of 1978 at the famous New York jazz club. Burrell's tone on guitar is elegant and articulate with clean lines, yet his style is always adventurous and swinging. Considered to be the link between Charlie Christian and Wes Montgomery, Kenny Burrell is still performing, recording, and teaching at UCLA. Disc one features a solo rendition of the classic Oscar Brown, Jr./Nat Adderly composition "Work Song." Joining the guitarist on both discs are drummer Sherman Ferguson and bassist Larry Gales who work seamlessly with the leader. Kenny's theme song, "It's Getting Dark," closes out disc one and the second disc starts with Sonny Rollins pressure cooker "Pent Up House."

Yusef Lateef's **Part Of The Search**, and Rahsaan Roland Kirk's **The Case Of The 3 Sided Dream In Audio Color** are two albums originally produced by Dorn when he was at Atlantic. He has reissued them together as the double-disc **Separate But Equal**. Joel's intent to pair these two similar artists (both multi-instrumentalists, both formidable talents, both inquisitive and adventurous), though, fails. Lateef's **Part Of The Search** is one of his better records from the 70's. He plays tenor and alto sax and is joined by numerous musicians and singers including pianist Kenny Barron who penned the

opening number "K.C. Shuffle" and "Lunceford Prance." The disc ends with a pretty reading of "Gettin' Sentimental." Unfortunately, Kirk's **Three Sided Dream** holds none of the charm of the Lateef effort. It is awash in over indulgence and short on content. There are a couple of moments, but this "contractual obligation" release should not have been revisited.

Kirk, a truly magnificent improviser is much better served by Dorn's **Left Hook Right Cross**, a reissue of two Rahsaan records Joel produced. Disc one is **Volunteered Slavery**. This 1969 gem features 5 studio tracks and excerpts from Kirk's performance at the '69 Newport Jazz festival including an outstanding medley in tribute to John Coltrane. Trumpeter Charles McGhee and trombonist Dick Griffin accompany Kirk who treads the ground between melodic and dissonant, in and out, with virtual abandon, utter ease, and intelligence. Griffin and McGhee are also on board for the 1971 release **Blacknuss**, a variety of R&B and pop tunes, spirituals and hymns that highlight Kirk's devotion to the history of black music and his wicked sense of humor.

Jazz That Swings is a compilation of "greatest hits" from many of 32 Jazz's reissues. It features Eddie Harris, Modern Jazz Quartet, Red Garland, Sonny Criss, David "Fathead" Newman, Hank Crawford, Les McCann, "Groove" Holmes, Woody Shaw, Hank Jones, and Cedar Walton, and is a great addition to any collection.

- Bud Callahan



MIGHTY PURPLE
PARA MEJOR O PEOR....
MIGHTY PURPLE LIVE
Wild Pitch Records

Dumb name. Sorry. I also don't really dig "jam" bands. Sorry. Mighty Purple is based out of Hamden, Connecticut. I really hate Hamden. Not sorry. So, with this many strikes against

them before I barely even listened to the disc, my fangs should be gnashing. Malevolent drool should be winding a secret path down my face. Unfortunately for my, usually, poison pen—Mighty Purple has put together a good, tight, live set from a sold-out show at Toad's Place. I've heard rumor that the band often sells out this particular venue and from the sound of the crowd they've obviously reached "local hero" status. Mighty Purple consists of Steve Rodgers on vocals and rhythm guitar, Jon Rodgers on vocals and lead guitar, David Keith on drums, and Adrian Van de Graaff on bass. I've got to tell you that there is a lot of noodling here: normally a musical death warrant, but with these guys it works. Nothing is over done. They balance out intricate vocal interplay with an almost Pink Floydish propensity for heavy, slow, and thick instrumental work. Well, Floyd is an unfair comparison: Mighty Purple actually provides some kickin' energy to their tunes.

While there are some solid influences being pedaled here, the band shows a unique sound and well orchestrated song craftsmanship. They don't fall into the easy trap many of their peers and predecessors have: that is to say that unlike Phish, Dave Mathews, Widespread Panic, etc., Mighty Purple plays, for the most part, in tight audience and listener friendly solidity. They swirl and dive, the song power builds and collapses, you can hear the audience being caught up in the music and the performance, and Mighty Purple plays the crowd with an experience that is both well practiced and, necessarily, naturally occurring in the best of live-oriented musicians. The choice of releasing a live album was a good one. A lot of the substance of the twelve songs on this disc would have difficulty translating into the studio format. This is one of those bands that, obviously to the listener, feeds and grows off the energy of a crowd. From the onset of track one, "Brother," and the great vocal point counter-point that the Rodgers do together, there is no doubt that Mighty Purple is full of talent and ability.

Through "Drive," "Gratitude," "Flying Solo," and the rest of the disc, they give the appearance of practiced comfort. Like they're not even trying and yet still firing out a semblance of greatness (or rather, greatness to come). The standouts here are the aforementioned "Brother," "Damn The Clouds," "Sick & Tired," "Fire Song," and the last tune, "Black Circles." While not having totally won me over to the genre, I certainly can see why Mighty Purple is gaining such regional popularity. I guess that when I finally snap and go hunting neophippies with a big gun and a long scope

I'll let Mighty Purple be. For a peek into this purple world you can visit the band at www.mightypurple.com and, while you're at it, you might as well see what else Wild Pitch Records has going on at www.wildpitchrecords.com. And don't forget... I've got you in my sights.

- Duke Aaron
Il Duce



**HORACE SILVER
JAZZ HAS
A SENSE OF HUMOR
GRP/Verve**

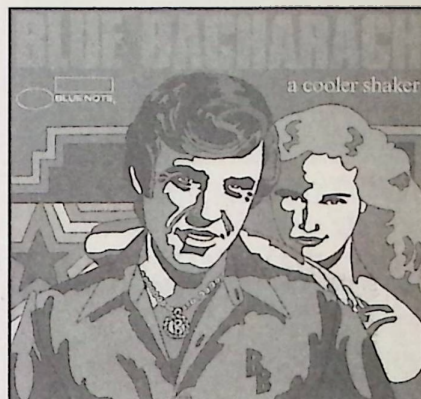
Horace Silver, "The Hardbop Grandpop," has dedicated his new CD **Jazz Has A Sense of Humor** to the memory of Thomas "Fats" Waller, a force in jazz in the 20's and 30's. Both Waller and Silver are pianists and both have composed many songs considered jazz standards. In the liner notes Silver points out that "Fats" was a humorist and entertainer, and there has been humor in the jazz world since it's inception despite the complaints of self-proclaimed "jazz purists."

On this set of "soul jazz" originals Silver is joined by Ryan Kisor, winner of the Thelonius Monk Institute's trumpet competition in 1990 at the age of 17. His tone is brassy and bright, reminiscent of Tom Harrell and Clark Terry. Silver makes plenty of room for him to improvise in this set of nine songs, including the three part "Mama Suite." This is an instrumental work, but Silver's witty and sometimes ribald lyrics, are included in the jacket. Reed man Jimmy Greene contributes tenor and soprano sax. His soprano is exotic and his solo perfectly stated on "Gloria." This cut also features a beautifully crafted piano solo filled with quotes and expert twists and turns. John Webber is solid on bass, and Willie Jones III is the perfect choice on drums, keeping everything swinging with his understated style and steady propulsion. Webber and Jones have worked with

Kisor on his recent release, **The Usual Suspects**. Silver's tight arranging benefits from this already cohesive unit.

This is an up-tempo session and it starts from the jump with "Satisfaction Guaranteed." Horace Silver and his young cohorts find the groove and ride it through this powerful recording that also includes four more Silver originals: "Philly Millie," "Ah-Ma-Tell," "I Love Annies Fanny," and "Where Do I Go From Here?" Listen to Silver improvise and you will discover that he is subtle, intricate and witty. Jazz does, indeed, have a sense of humor!

- Bud Callahan



**VARIOUS ARTISTS
BLUE BACHARACH:
A COOLER SHAKER
Blue Note/Capitol**

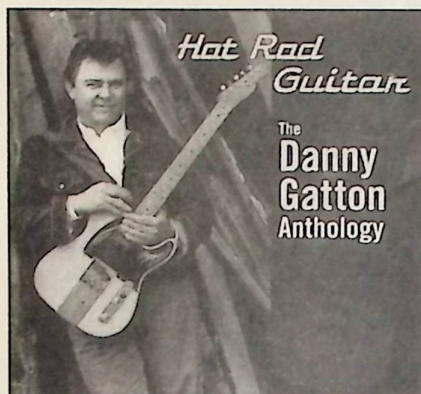
Yeah, baby... hot off the heels of Austin Powers' ringing endorsement of this song stylist comes Blue Note's collection of various artists covering classic Bacharach. Stanley Turrentine's on four tracks taken from four different albums, so you can pretty much figure out what this guy was listening to in the mid-to-late sixties. My favorite of his is "Walk On By," though I also enjoy the big band swing of "Always Something There To Remind Me." Nancy Wilson clocks in for two, and manages to make "Alfie" her own. Grant Green also turns in two tracks, and he manages to make it seem like Bacharach was writing for him, baby.

There are a lot of great artists doing all-too-familiar tunes like "This Guy's In Love With You" and "What The World Needs Now Is Love," although there are a few of the more obscure numbers, like "They Don't Give Medals," interpreted here by Lou Rawls. For Julia Roberts fans, there's Reuben Wilson's cover of "I Say A Little Prayer," with plenty of room for Karaoke accompaniment. I love the Three Sounds, but I could have done without

Olier Nelson's intrusive horn arrangements on "The Look of Love." Other than that, you can expect this to provide excellent background to any cocktail party or late night gathering.

(www.bluenote.com)

- Phil Straub



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ANTHOLOGY
Rhino**

Guitar Player called him the greatest guitar player that you never heard, and that's not too far off the mark. A master of the instrument, he could play in any style... and with such

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blinding speed that it was enough to make you give up playing yourself. It's no wonder he was given the nickname "The Humbler."

A virtuoso from the get-go, Gatton played in numerous bands throughout the sixties. It wasn't until the mid-seventies, though, that his sound came bubbling to the top. He and his band, the Fat Boys, recorded their first full-length release, **American Music** (1975), on the bass player's own label. The album highlighted Danny's intense love of music, with each song focusing on a particular style or genre of American music. It was a great album, but went nowhere.

The band broke up, and Danny formed a group that included Chuck Tilley (from Roy Buchanan's outfit) and Evan Johns (of the H-Bombs) on vocals. They recorded a great single, "Ugly Man," but since no one wanted to put it out, his mom, Norma Raye Gatton, formed her own label, NRG Records. Shortly after that, they released a full length album, **Redneck Jazz** (1978). During the formation of the album the band traveled to Nashville, where they hooked up with pedal steel legend Buddy Emmons for an incredible interpretation of Jack McDuff's "Rock Candy." Shortly after that, Emmons joined the band, which became The Redneck Jazz Explosion.

Fame was far away, though, and Danny decided to try a different approach. He joined Robert Gordon's band and toured the country, creating converts along the way. It didn't last, and Danny got out of the music scene for a few years.

By the mid-eighties, he could keep silent no longer and recorded an all-instrumental album, **Unfinished Business** (1987). This record once again featured an across-the-board mix of musical styles, from jazz to blues to country to r&b. The record led to an Elektra seven-album contract, the first of which was **88 Elmira Street** (1991). Like **Unfinished Business** before it, **88 Elmira Street** highlighted a number of styles, never staying too long in any of them. Afraid of being pigeonholed, Gatton avoided any straight ahead country or jazz numbers; which is too bad, because he excelled in both.

Fortunately for us, he turned up on a record the very next year that focused specifically on his jazz leanings. Blue Note Records released a collection of different artists called **New York Stories** (1992), which featured Danny on two cuts. Both of them are Gatton originals (including a tribute to Lenny

Breau), and have him playing alongside such luminaries as Joshua Redman and Roy Hargrove.

Back at Elektra, things weren't going so great. His first release was less-than-enthusiastically received. Of course, it's difficult to market an instrumental album, especially one that transcends genres from song to song (and sometimes even within the song itself). Whatever the reason, Gatton's second Elektra release, **Cruising Deuces** (1993), was to be his last. It was slicker and less homespun than his previous disc, but it did feature an incredible medley of early Elvis songs, with Delbert McClinton on vocals. In it, Gatton shows off his love for guitarist Scotty Moore, playing Scotty's solos note for note while at the same time embellishing them with his own go-for-broke style.

After his breakup with Elektra, Gatton released a couple of records on Vermont's Big Mo label. The first was a live recording of his trio at The Birchmere in Alexandria, Va. For this record, he was able to show off his love of jazz, covering "Sunnymoon for Two" (Sonny Rollins), "Caravan" (Duke Ellington) and "Land of Make Believe" (Chuck Mangione), the last of which has to be heard to be believed. His second release for Big Mo, **Relentless** (1994), found the Gatton trio collaborating with jazz keyboardist Joey DeFrancesco. The album mostly featured Gatton originals, though there are two notable exceptions: their blistering rendition of Thelonious Monk's "Well, You Needn't" and the bluesy "The Chess Players" by Wayne Shorter.

Danny Gatton ended his life in 1994, so there's no telling where he may have gone from here. But judging from the territory he had already covered, there certainly wasn't anything he couldn't do. The Rhino collection is a well-deserved overview of this musical great, from the days of the Fat Boys to his forays in jazz. Nearly every record he's released has been touched upon, making this a very thorough overview indeed. While many choice cuts aren't included, the ones that are give you a strong sense of Danny's amazing abilities. There are even a few previously unreleased cuts, too including a great cover of "Canadian Sunset" by the Redneck Jazz Explosion.

If you could only have one record by Danny Gatton, this would be it. However, I should warn you. Danny's records are like Lays potato chips: you can't have just one.

(www.rhino.com)

- Phil Straub

MICHAEL FREDO

INTRODUCING
MICHAEL FREDO
Andy Hilfiger
Entertainment/Quest
Records/Warner Bros.



Dear Humanity,

Obviously, life as we know it, is over. Nineteen year old heart-throb, Michael Fredo, has a CD and VMag saw fit to give it to me. What have I done to deserve this? I wouldn't wish listening to *Introducing...* on even the worst of Baltic war criminals. Warner Bros. is a big corporation, so there is little blame to lay on them. I mean, you kind of expect crap like this sometimes, right? Andy Hilfiger? Well, I just don't know what to say about the Hilfiger family branching into bad pop music and tying it in to their clothing and perfume ads. Somehow, I think the decayed skeletal remains of Karl Marx are sporting a very knowing smile just about now. One of those situations that just borders on the bizarre. Truth is stranger than fiction, I must say. OK, but Quest? That is Mr. Quincy Jones. Can he fall any farther from reality? Yeah, sure, Quince has always bowed before the all mighty dollar, but this is a new low. I'm just simply at a loss.

Fredo counts Michael Jackson, Marvin Gaye, the Stones, Basia, Bjork, and Bette Midler as his major influences. I have lost the ability to respond. I don't know what to say. He went to NY's Professional Children's School. He toured as a vocalist with the Duke Ellington Orchestra. Unsurprisingly he is featured in Tommy jeans print and TV ads. The song "Who Said" is the theme song for Tommy Girl fragrance TV spots and is in the house here as track six. Other than that, I refuse to discuss the rest of the material presented here, except to say that this CD makes 'N Sync seem like total tough guy bad-asses. The most interesting thing about the young Fredo is that he owns two love birds, two chameleons, a chinchilla, and a pair of mice. If your young child wants this album you have a moral responsibility to lock him or her in a steel box for several years and hope with all your heart that your child will become so ferar

that only the sounds of wolves will enchant them upon their release from captivity. The world is doomed. We are a culture in decline. Let loose the lions. Pray to whatever god, spirit, or alien you believe in, because the fact of this album's release is the final proof that our end is nigh. To speed up the coming oblivion check out www.michaelfredo.com.

Most fearfully yours,
-Duke Aaron
Il Duce



TELETUBBIES NURSERY RHYMES AND OTHER FUN SONGS Mammoth Records

Oh my God. The fact that additional music was provided for this album by some group called "King Pleasure and the Biscuit Boys" should be enough to keep it out of the hands of any caring parent. So be warned.

There was a time when I could watch and enjoy the Teletubbies. There really was. But it really helps if you are abusing pills and booze. I went through the tortures of the damned sitting through this CD, and I may have to start hitting the sauce again because of it.

For those of you not familiar, the Teletubbies are post-Atomic War mutants living a cushy existence, getting fat on purple custard and ambling about in a care-free existence on a Hobbit-like hill in the remaining time they have before their radiation-scarred overlords ascend to the surface to harvest them as food.

The PBS programmers, with ever a nervous eye to the folks holding the purse strings in Congress, routinely delete the scenes of apocalyptic cannibals gnawing on the bones of their tubby kill. So what we get is a strangely sweet and brain-damaged amusement, which frightens if you actually sit down and think about it. The British, who made this program, clearly have something dark planned for us. We should never forget

the Year of 1812; we can't let our guard fall against these people. This, despite the fact that had it not been for us they'd all be speaking German now.

This CD is a compilation of songs from the apparently popular video of the same name, among what is sure to be a host of releases featuring Tinky Winky and his portly pals who are less inclined to buggery: the mutant of color Dipsy, diva Laa-Laa, and the lovely Po. Because this is a British program, some of the nursery rhymes will be quite unfamiliar to most American tots, except perhaps for those few who have not yet been shaken to death by their British nannies. So we get limey treats like "Grand Old Duke of York," "Banbury Cross," and "Pat-A-Cake" instead of "Pattie Cake."

Out of the context of the video, this CD sounds like just a lot of flatulent noise, ambient synthetic music, and constant giggling. This is what I imagine it would sound like if you were locked in a bad sensory deprivation tank in a nursery school.

- Punco Godyn



SANTANA SUPERNATURAL Arista

Here's a guy who's lost not a whit of appeal since his debut in the sixties with what was certainly the first rock en Español headline act. If anything, he's even better. And what a line-up he's assembled for this disc! From Latin superstars Mana to Grammy winner Lauryn Hill to fellow rock pioneer Eric Clapton, the roster's large and each gives their all to this labor of love. Santana himself is in absolutely unequaled form here with a fluidity that he alone possesses. No one is a more soulful guitarist.

A lot of rock fans find the "love and harmony" theme to be a bit much over the years, but Santana always puts his money where his mouth is: his com-

"EVERYBODY LIKES ME"

© Renrut 1999

"EVERYBODY
LIKES ME MOST INTENSELY.
HOW VERY BORING."



...13,14,15
syllables!
GENIUS!

MY FIRST "HAIKU," 1962

You might say I had a
high opinion of myself.

I'm smart, I'm talented,
I'm not too bad looking.
I'm a shoo-in for Home
Room Representative!



I'll vote
for you.



My rival was
Jane Pskowski

Hi.

Vote
for me!



Thanks.

I didn't even vote
for myself.



I'll vote for Jane,
poor girl. This 'll
make her feel better.

You're
good.

BALLOT

The results came as
a bit of a shock.



Thank you!

I voted
for you!

TOTAL:
JANE 24
RUT 1

By 1963 Jane's ambition
knew no bounds.

I hereby announce
my candidacy for
class president.



She must
be stopped!

I have to admit that I
was glad when she lost.

They don't
deserve
you.

ELECTI
VOTE!

The agony
of defeat!
Haw!



That wasn't all that
happened that day

School
intercom

Brzzztzzk!
... hit in the
head while in
a motorcade
in Dallas...



It was Nov. 22, 1963!
Mr. Barlow's History Class.

Bzz... Parkland Memorial...

well, class, he's a
young president, so
maybe he'll be O.K.



School was dismissed.



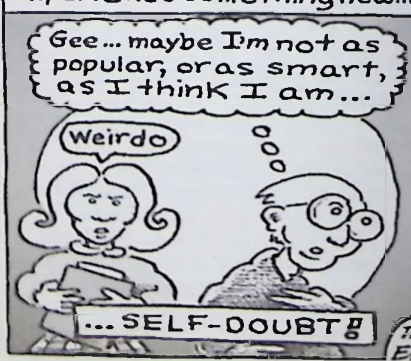
Hey, Jane!
Wait up!

We walked a little ways.
I tried to make conversation.



So, aren't you glad you
weren't elected president?

Her reaction caused me to
experience something new...



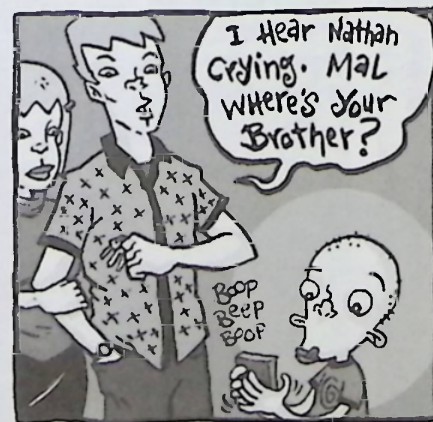
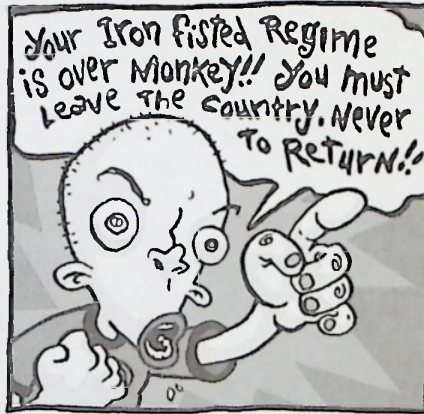
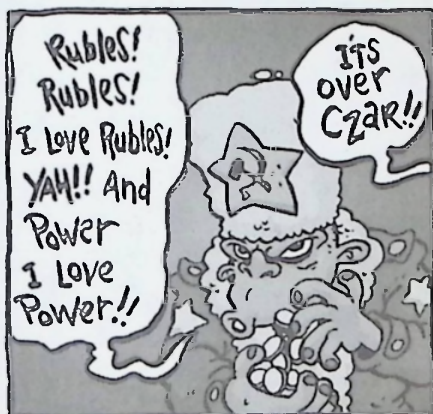
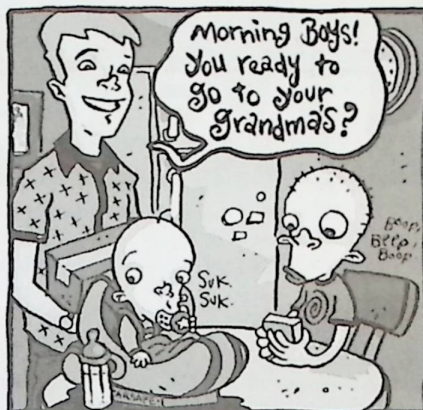
Gee... maybe I'm not as
popular, or as smart,
as I think I am...

Weirdo

... SELF-DOUBT

™ AND © 1999 BY FUNATIX! INC. FOR THE PEOPLE!

the misheard misadventures of MALA PROP! IN THE MONKEY CZAR



teopaeoa[†]

CONTEST:



**the end of photography as evidence of anything*

Correctly identify 1) the local spot pictured above and 2) tell us what's wrong with the picture, and win a chance for the following prizes -----

1st prize - A gift certificate to any class at Yes Learning Center (a \$130. value!) 2nd and 3rd prizes - colorful and enigmatic Brain Samba t-shirts from Good Idea, Inc.!

Entry deadline is DECEMBER 7.

Winners will be chosen randomly from all correct entries. Send all entries to: VMag teopaeoa Contest, POBox 774, Northampton MA 01061, or E-mail us at vcromag@aol.com (teopaeoa by mr peter laird)

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positions are usually underpinned by these sentiments, but he always seems to be able to make believers of us all. So much popular music today lacks emotion and falls a bit flat as a result. No matter, there's plenty on hand here. All killer and no filler, this disc measures up in mass too, tipping the scale at over 75 minutes. There's something here for just about everyone.

My favorite is the torrid "Smooth" with guest vocalist Rob Thomas. It's a real barn burner and it's getting lots of well deserved air-play on a variety of stations. Everlast drops by to sing an equally hot "Put Your Lights On," and the lengthy track "The Calling" brings Clapton aboard for some vintage woodshedding. Tribal rhythms propel "Migra," with blowtorch guitar and mariachi horns (in spite of the brass section, this cut sounds the most like classic Santana). But it's not just adding guests from among today's hitmakers that makes this recording sound fresh. Carlos Santana can truly make his guitar speak. Short on gimmickry and long on substance and passion, his playing constantly evolves, but leaves no question of who's playing. Santana is nothing if not an iconoclast.

Some of the vocals are in Spanish, but most are in English. There's

some hip-hop, and modern r&b crooning, but there's so much feeling put into it all that the general effect is more comforting than cloying. As we would expect, the percussion is beyond reproach and the production white hot.

So, the addition of current stars will undoubtedly draw many new fans, but in the end, it's Santana himself who will impress listeners most, with his matchless mix of fire and ice.

Supernatural is surely a high point in his impressive career, a Grammy contender, and probably a platinum seller as well. Supernatural indeed.

(Santana, POB 881630, San Francisco, CA 94188-1630 / www.santana.com)

- Meathook Williams

ADAM SANDLER STAN AND JUDY'S KID Warner Bros.

Adam Sandler reminds me of one of these guys I used to hate in college, who would become the life of the party for singing "Louie Louie" all in belches. Most of the time it's just incred-

ibly annoying, but occasionally, if you were drunk or otherwise caught off-guard, you might think they were funny.

I'm impaired here because I've never got the Adam Sandler "thing." I liked very little of his work on *Saturday Night Live*, and I am completely confused over how he has become this huge sensation at the box office.

But he has always cracked me up when he picks up a guitar and serenades us with one of his retarded ditties. There's a little of that on this CD, the best being the "Chanukah Song Part II," a sequel to an earlier song listing celebrities of whom Jewish kids can share proud kinship with.

He continues that in this song, recorded live at Brandeis University, noting the truth that "Mary Tyler Moore's husband is Jewish, because we're pretty good in the sack," and singing of Winona Ryder playing dreydel and drinking Manichevitz. Only Adam Sandler would dare rhyming Chanukah with a line imploring us to go "get drunk in Tiajuanaika."

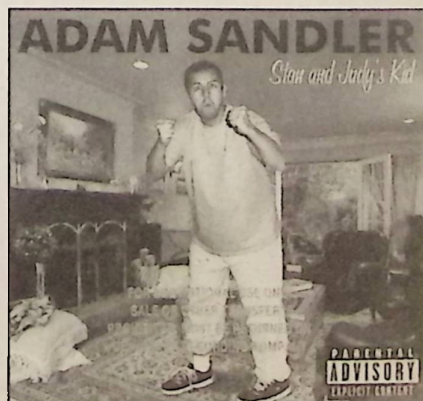
I also loved "She Comes Home To Me," for which Sandler apparently managed to get Frank Sinatra's touring band to back him up on. Singing in a Sinatra or Tony Bennett-like lounge style, Sandler sings of his devotion for his special lady, a prostitute.

"She can stuff three cocks in her cheek, but she comes home to me," he declares. It goes on from there, describing her services provided to cattle and coprophiliacs alike.

I found the rest of the album incredibly unfunny. The promotional material tells us that most of the skits were recorded in Sandler's home, and I'm not surprised. I have this image of him surrounded by chuckling yes-men, guffawing over the half-baked skits, wolfing down party mix.

From the inner thoughts of a peeping tom to the running gag about a stud's stupid names for his penis, this material is just plain boring.

- Punco Godyn



99.3

ROCKS

W H M P - F M

CESARIA EVORA CAFÉ ATLANTICO BMG



With a voice as thick as chocolate mousse, soul-drenched and almost androgynous in register, Cape Verde's Cesaria Evora releases yet another recording, **Café Atlantico**. It's becoming difficult to keep up with the diva's prolific output in the last couple of years. But, as with most great song stylists, more formidable material always seems to make itself available. Like Brazil, Cape Verde is a former colony of Portugal (its last one, Macao, reverts to Chinese rule this year) and, at this time at least, Evora is the grande dame of Portuguese song. A lifetime of whiskey and cigarettes have only enhanced her remarkable voice. The mornas she sings will be familiar to fans of Portuguese fado music, but have something more, what residents of the Big Easy might call "lagniappe." In addition to her accomplished five piece ensemble, most of the songs on **Café Atlantico** are substantially orchestrated. This isn't to say that this disc lacks intimacy. Lush string passages are never obtrusive and a close-miked immediacy is given to the principal players, her guitarist/music director, Bau, particularly so. The feel is more like French chanteuse Edith Piaf's music somewhat updated and a bit bluesier (some have compared her to Billie Holiday or Bessie Smith; the comparison escapes me). The music as, obviously, the language, will remind you most of Brazil. And, although Cape Verde is technically part of Africa, this music is far more European than that of, say, Angola or Mozambique. In my opinion, Portuguese is easily as romantic and beautiful to the ear as French is (actually, some of her songs are sung in French as well). She's recently been nominated for a Grammy and surely deserves one, "Cize" is often called the "Barefoot Diva."

Though you can find her most recent half dozen CD's at most of the

area's record shops, this one is as good as any to start with. And quite a few local radio stations play her regularly; in fact, WFCR brought her to the area a couple of weeks ago.

A grandmother and matriarch of a large family, she's had the insight (and good fortune) to serve as mentor to a gifted protégé, the lovely and talented Fantcha, herself breaking onto the scene recently. But Cesaria does not seem likely to abdicate her throne in the near future.

(www.lusafrika.com)
- Meathook Williams



ANDY BUZZI MEDIUM-FI Brujo Records

Well, Andy Buzzi's new disc **Medium-Fi** kind of blew me away. I gotta tell you that I didn't expect it to. The other day, as I walked through town, I ran into my bud, Nate, and he introduced me to this funny lookin' guy - Andy. So we start talking and it turns out Mr. Buzzi was in town because he had played at Fire & Water the night before. He gave me the disc and we talked, while he sat on a bench, terrified as this kinda nasty bee harassed him. It was sort of funny because the damn thing kept bouncing off his glasses. Anyway, I took the disc home and to my amazement... it totally smoked. I was expecting some dullish folksy, but Andy bridges a smooth gap between acoustic guitar and some pretty interesting influ-

ences. Visions of CSN without the very annoying (at least to me) harmony parts leaped before me. He adds a country flavor here, a rock tempo there, some well crafted lyrics that speak of quick wit and cleverness without the normal downside of being overly cute, and just plain writes some phenomenal songs. I'm sorry that I missed the solo-acoustic show. On the album he plays with a full band and includes some pretty impressive overdubbing. He sings, plays acoustic and electric guitar, harmonica, bass, and violin. So, obviously we're talking about a very talented musician, but the co-production team of Andy and Randy Hunnicke put together a sparkling product. The vocals could have been pumped a little higher in the mix, but the levels really don't take away too much from the final results.

"Way The Hell Down" opens the disc with a catchy, percussive sound broken up with a great half-tempo chorus and leads really well into the more country-folk style of "Me And My Love," where Andy shows that he has the balls to sing a chorus of la-la-la's and pull it off. "Ode To My Friend" breaks into some pretty cool use of contrasting tempos and pays a little homage to the guys who recorded the album, New Castle Sound from Bristol, RI. There's also some good lead guitar and harmonica to boot. "Farm by The Sea," written with Randy Hunnicke does a little acoustic blues thing with a nice Turtles-type of background chorus. "Grandpa Played" gives a little insight into Andy's personalized songwriting style and reasons for being the artist he is. The downtempo western sound should have been a great set up for a real rager of a tune, but unfortunately it was followed by "Further Conversations With Don Paco." The song has a good bass back-ground vocal, but isn't up to the rest of the disc's quality level. Oh well, one loser in a basket of pearls. "Babylon Blues," written with Amy Kalisher, brings the disc back to solid ground, bringing out a little more of Andy's vocal range without the over-reaching normally accompanied by such an act. "Church Street" continues the excellent vocal work and sets the tone way down and full of power. Reminded me a little of some of the more accessi-

con*dom n. a protective
coating with a tip commonly
worn on a DICK.

up yours.



ble stuff from Dream's first release in seventies. It also sets up a cookin' arrangement of Traffic's arrangement of that English traditional tune "John Barleycorn Must Die." It includes a bit of nice flute work highlighting Andy's right-hand technique. The last track, "Cool Of The Moon," sees some great rhythm guitar and brings up the tempo level for a good album closer.

For more on Andy and other Brujo label offerings, check out www.123theworld.com/brujo.

And the next time you see a funny looking guy being attacked by a bee spark up a little conversation.

- Duke Aaron
Il Duce



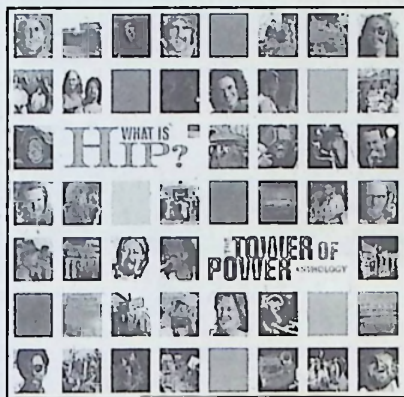
VYKKIE VOX CAN YOU FEEL IT? Webrock

When I reviewed Vykkie's EP in early 1998, I fully expected her full-length CD to see her bluesy sound mature itself, perhaps diversifying in the bargain. I wasn't disappointed. This release, *Can You Feel It?*, is more sophisticated, more complex. The material is tighter and has a bit more edge. And it complements her voice perfectly throughout. The production is also of a larger scope, making for a fuller, more dynamic recording. The tunes are an interesting mix (there's even a rap number, Purple Funk, featuring Delroy Martin), with most tracks having once again been written by Vox and her main collaborator, keyboardist Dave Osoff. The results are even better this time around. One of the few covers is a nice version of Johnny Cash's "Get Rhythm." Osoff's Hammond playing is still a major part of the sound, and there's plenty of gutsy guitar work. Vykkie roars through a nice remake of the soul classic "I Just Want To Celebrate" which must be quite rousing live. The signature "Woman's Touch" has been reprised here as well. "Turn It

Around" is my favorite here, although the last cut, "On Your Side," is a close second with its funky clavinet and sweltering sax solo from Scott Shetler. Opting for solid performing rather than pyrotechnics, this disc exemplifies the straightforward Boston blues/rock sound. It may not quite capture the impact of Vox's live show, but it makes a nice party disc and you even get an off-the-wall extra track at the end.

(Webrock Records, POB 45,
Wilmington MA 01887 /
www.VykkieVox.com)

- Meathook Williams



TOWER OF POWER WHAT IS HIP? Rhino

The question is rhetorical, of course; Tower of Power is what's hip. The great Oakland soul band has been cranking out funky, brass-laden grooves for 30 years and the best of that output, culled from 18 albums, is collected on this 2-CD anthology. *WIH* answers the old question — can a band of mostly white guys play soul music? — with a resounding yes.

Tenor saxman Emilio Castillo was fronting a band called the Motowns in 1968 when he hooked up with a bari-tone sax player named Steve Kupka; the two men have been the cornerstone of TOP's changing lineup ever since. In 1969, Bill Graham signed them to a management and recording contract. *WIH* features three cuts from their first LP, *East Bay Grease*; "Knock Yourself Out," "Back on the Streets Again" — James Brown-style funk workouts — and "Sparkling in the Sand," a slow, trippy ballad with extended flute/sax jams.

TOP split with Graham after the first LP and went on their first tour, opening for Bo Diddley and Creedence Clearwater Revival, neighbors from the East Bay who were big TOP fans. They became regulars at Oakland's On

Broadway club where they jammed all night with Elvin Bishop, Boz Scaggs and players from Santana and Sly Stone's band.

The next LP, *Bump City*, was a big advance both in the band's playing and collaborative songwriting. *WIH* includes "You've Got To Funkifyze," which Castillo said in the liner notes is equal parts Memphis and San Francisco, the lovely ballad "What Happened To The World That Day?" and "You're Still A Young Man," the band's first national hit.

TOP continued to get better with the addition of vocalist Lenny Williams — one of 8 vocalists over the years — and organ player Chester Thompson. *WIH* features 5 cuts from their third LP, *Tower Of Power*, including the sizzling title cut, the ballad "So Very Hard To Go" and the funky "Soul Vaccination." There are also 5 cuts from TOP's fourth and best LP *Back To Oakland*, including the beautiful "Below Us, All The City Lights" and the jam "Squib Cakes."

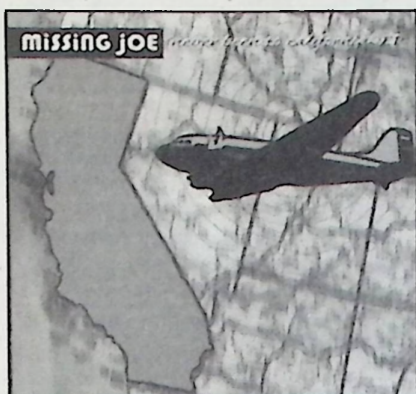
The next two LPs, *Urban Renewal* and *In the Slot*, were the last with the band's superb original drummer David Garibaldi and with sax whiz Lenny Pickett, who went on to record with David Bowie, Paul McCartney and Mick Jagger before becoming musical director of the *Saturday Night Live* band. Chester Thompson also left to join Santana. Vocalist Williams shares the spotlight with newcomer Hubert Tubbs, who smolders on ballads like "The Soul Of A Child" and "As Surely As I Stand Here."

TOP then signed a contract with CBS Records and lost their way due to drug addiction and disco fluff on their next few LPs. The few great numbers from those years, "Am I A Fool" and "Just Make A Move (And Be Yourself)" are included on *WIH*. Sliding into bankruptcy, the TOP horn section continued to do session work with artists as diverse as Poison, Public Image Ltd. and Michael Bolton. A European tour with Huey Lewis and gigs on the *David Letterman Show* helped get TOP back on its feet.

The band is back in business with the 1997 release *Rhythm & Business* and *Soul Vaccination: Tower of Power Live*, released this year. Original members Kupka, Garibaldi and Castillo are back. The cuts from the new recordings are excellent.

Because their output ranged from killers to clunkers, a TOP anthology made perfect sense. *WIH* contains the cream from one of the funkier Bay Area bands.

- Dave Biederman



MISSING JOE
NEVER BEEN TO
CALIFORNIA
RCJ Entertainment

Here's a four-song ep from a band destined for at least fourteen minutes of fame. That last minute of the normal fifteen should be saved for a VHI *Where Are They Now?* special. Everything about these three guys is smooth, perfect, and just a little, well, pleasant. What happened to Rock-N-Roll? Watered down blandness and mediocrity is creeping over the radio like a bad skin fungus. Missing Joe are good musicians, they have good vocals, the songs are written just right. No warts here and, I guess maybe, that's my objection. Un-threatening. Un-rebellious. Un-anything. They had their release party for **Never Been To California** as the opening act to Letters To Cleo. Perfect. The student follows the master.

The band is comprised of Matt Rafal on lead vocals and bass, Dave Dombrowski on guitar and vocals, and Brian Coes on drums. They formed in '95 and have put out a couple of demos before the release of this ep. The ep is a couple of years old and Missing Joe are planning to release a full length soon. I'd like to get my hands on their demos and the new release. I'm wondering if **Never Been To California** is another example of young musicians taking too much studio advice from guys with short pony tails that cut their recording teeth in the early/mid eighties. The songs really do show the potential of promise and the band has done well gigging live. Some part of the puzzle is missing. I'm hoping the piece we're looking for is merely good management. The songs included on this release are "Martini," "Turpentine," "Drag Racing" and "Niner." "Martini" is way too slick and overdone. "Turpentine" has a little rock behind it and sounds like a live setting would really bust it out. "Drag Racing" kicks pretty well. "Niner" gets some blood flowing

for the only time on **Never Been To California**, but falls down like the other tunes. There is definitely a lot of talent here, merely studio misdirected. (I hope this review doesn't stop them from sending me the new CD.)

(Missing Joe, POB 230416, Boston MA 02123-0416 or at www.missingjoe.com)

- Duke Aaron
 Il Duce



FILTER
TITLE OF RECORD
Reprise

Can we be frank? I'd sooner sit in a tub farting and watching the bubbles come up than finish listening to the rest of this Filter record. Ok, ok, I'll get back and finish listening to it ferchris-sakes; friggin' touchy editor....

This is not really a bad record. But it also is not a good record. Is it loud? Yes. Is it heavy? Yes. Do they rock? Yes. Is it original? Most definitely not. What Filter have delivered is an amalgam of recycled heaviness that aspires to be "alt" but is almost devoid of any meaningful spirit. It is a disease that has crippled almost every current rock band, and is starting to deflate the power of rock itself. Not that it's all Filter's fault, but ya gotta start assigning blame somewhere....

Now for the details. First, the title: following up the successful debut **Short Bus** with the cleverly titled **Title of Record**, the depth of imagination and creativity overfloweth... a parade of ennui-inducing heaviness akin to a paint-by-numbers kit you got for Xmas, but soon tired of. They almost seem to be fishing for a style, toning down the full-on assault of "Nice Shot" to something a little more pop-friendly. This isn't the smartest move, as they have erased the little bit of character they had going for themselves, but intelligence is not really on the agenda here. They sound closer to Bush and Creed than ever: more loud stuff without any intelligence propelling

it. Actually they're starting to look like Bush as well, hmmm... "Take a Picture" is pure U2, faux-sensitive lyrics driven by a lazy and dreamy vocal, restrained playing—actually close enough for a "My Sweet Lord" style lawsuit. Fortunately U2 don't need the keb. (didn't stop 'em from ruining Negativland and SST some years back, tho'). I still would rather listen to this than the Backstreet Boys, but given the choice between Backstreet and silence, well... bring on John Cage's "4:52" please.

- Carwreck deBangs

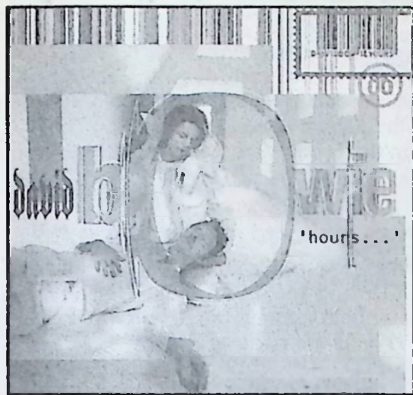
STEREOLAB
COBRA AND PHASES
GROUP PLAY VOLTAGE IN
THE MILKY NIGHT
Elektra

These guys had me worried a bit on their last release, **Dots and Loops** (1997). In an unnecessary attempt to update their space-age sounds, they enlisted Tortoise and techno whizzes Mouse on Mars to produce. The results: a band sounding like it was being pulled in two different directions at the same time. The techno influences of Mouse on Mars never quite gelled, and the two different styles never successfully synthesized into a coherent whole.

This time around tho' they've learned from their mistakes and ditched the techno for a strong and streamlined lounge approach. I know you're saying "But aren't they lounge already?" Well, they've upped the fake fur and swizzle stick quotient for this one. Vibe-heavy (courtesy of Tortoise guy John McEntire), **Cobra and Phases** is slick and tight and cocktail friendly. Picture Can trying to do Esquivel and you're in the ballpark. Also reminiscent of the High Llamas—Sean O'Hagan shows up as a guest—but more tension than in the easy grooves of the Llamas. The dense almost-jazz comes in sheets—well thought out arrangements—this is their best sounding CD yet.

One perplexing thing about this release: it isn't fundamentally different from a lot of jazz-lite that was vilified in the late sixties—big band injected with a dose of inert James Bond psychedelia. You remember—Herb Alpert & Tijuana Brass, Ferrante and Teicher, Mystic Moods Orchestra—the stuff that your parents have still kicking under the victrola. One question: wasn't that stuff so uncool you'd not admit that your parents even listened to it? And now it's the pinnacle of hip and cool? Hmmm... just thought I'd ask. Now, go out and buy this puppy before all the urban spacemen find out... Remember the Future.

- Carwreck deBangs



DAVID BOWIE
"hours..."
Virgin



IGGY POP
AVENUE B
Virgin



IGGY POP
SISTER MIDNIGHT
Cleopatra

If I had any imaginary friends growing up (from my only childhood and well into my thirties) they were the twin pillars of my definitions of cool: Bowie and Iggy. Bowie's **Space Oddity** was the first rock album I ever bought, Iggy's

The **Idiot** and **Lust For Life** the discs that most changed my life, with subsequent lp's from both gentlemen (especially Bowie's Brian Eno collaborations "Heroes," Low, Lodger; Iggy's **New Values** and **Loco Mosquito**) providing the soundtrack to all those pivotal life roads and u-turns; sex, booze, drugs, drug addictions, obsessions (death, aliens, more sex), factory, college, *The Puma Blues*, the Turtles, searching, wandering, Alaska, *VMag*. Thrown into the mix were a half dozen or so concerts by each: the Thin White Duke Tour, the Sound and Vision tour, Tin Machine, Iggy at Toad's; a couple of books (Iggy's **I Need More** being the best); way too many magazine articles; and now DavidBowie.com and .net.

And the music. Where Bowie was cosmic and aloof, charged full of sexuality spliced with enigmatic cut-up poetry, Iggy was direct, emotional, sometimes vulgar, often tortured and always true: Bowie the one I'd turn to when looking inwards or for ideas; Iggy when partying or pissed (which is not to say that Bowie's music lacked emotional release: where his words failed him—stiff upper lip and all—his various guitarists over the years (especially Adrien Belew and Reeves Gabrels) tore great screaming chunks out of the frozen gaze; nor did Iggy lack in poetry: **The Idiot's** "Tiny Girls," **Lust For Life's** "Some Weird Sin" and **Eat or Be Eaten's** "The Horse Song" convey—subtly and powerfully—loss, need, love.

Yeah, I probably over-identified with each.

And today? Reflective, old, fractured (them and/or me, you decide) come to mind when thinking of their output over the past decade. Which is not to say bad.

Bowie has been the most interesting by far. Tin Machine (the band he formed with Reeves Gabrels and Hunt and Tony Sales) produced a remarkably brutal pre-grunge grunge album, **Tin Machine** (1989), before lapsing into excess and non-direction. **Black Tie, White Noise** (1993), his first post-TM solo album, was a (hate this word) mature, jazz-tinged, wedding present to his wife, flavored with instrumentals and obtuse (re: stiff upper lip) family history. **Outside** (1995) saw a renewed collaboration with Brian Eno, a return to alien obsession ("Outside" and "Hearts Filthy Lesson") and an almost desperate experimentation: cutting-up lyrics with a Mac program, having individual band members approach given songs from very different musical/genre-specific angles (the bassist playing funk, the drummer, lounge, etc.), and all set within the context of a "concept" album (the art-ritual murder of

one Baby Grace Blue; go figure). 1997's **Earthling** saw an embrace of rock-soaked electronica (live not pre-programmed) and a surety of voice and strength of story not heard since 1980's **Scary Monsters** and **Super Creeps**.

And now comes "hours..." which, in all honesty, took several playings to get into, for, having viewed the electronica of **Earthling** as a logical step after the experimentation of **Outside**, I expected an album of, I dunno, futurism of some sort: I figured it's Bowie, it's the millennium, a perfect match. But then it is Bowie, after all and, ever unpredictable, he chooses to mark the millennium by looking back. And I don't just mean lyrically (life, love, loss, death; a man taking measure of his life) but musically as well, for "hours..." is nothing if not (stylistically) an early-seventies Bowie rock album, somewhat AOR-friendly, certainly listener-friendly, with smooth infectious choruses and harmonizing, Reeves playing like Mick Ronson here, Jimi there, and Bowie crooning with—can it be?—feeling. But "hours..." isn't all retro; there's a late-90's edginess to the production, weird vocal filterings and timing, odd Reeves noodlings here and there and, throughout it all, the perspective of experience, the wisdom of age. Highly recommended.

Iggy's **Avenue B**, on the other hand, I hate to say, is disappointing from a variety of perspectives. Continuing the going-through-the-motions slush that filled 1993's **American Caesar** and choked 1996's **Naughty Little Doggie**, **Avenue B** is just as lifeless. Actually, it's a different kind of lifeless: **Caesar** and **Doggie** at least tried to rock; **Avenue B** doesn't even try; it's the kind of disc I imagine an undead George Romero ex-rock star zombie would produce: a slow shuffling sort of album, with lyrical thoughts half-formed, too often repeated, singlemindedly stuck on fucking young girls. Iggy: you've been in LA way too long, bro.

Luckily for my Iggy jones, Cleopatra Records recently released **Sister Midnight**, a live recording of Iggy's March 21, 1977 performance at the Agora Ballroom, Cleveland, from the **Lust For Life** tour: Ricky Gardiner on guitar, Bowie on keyboards, Tony Sales, bass, Hunt Sales, drums. Full of classic Stooges tunes ("Raw Power," "1969," "Search 'N' Destroy," "Gimme Danger") and post-Stooges gems ("Turn Blue," "Sister Midnight," "Funtime") but full of Stooges-like controlled abandon, **Sister Midnight** captures Iggy and the **Lust For Life** band at the height of their, well, raw power. (Great production, too.)

- Murphy

38 Vid View

NEW on video
NOVEMBER

SOUTH PARK

A terrific satire of American social hypocrisy, which censors dirty words but makes excuses about going to war. The movie cleverly skewers every possible group: females, blacks, gays, Jews, mothers, parents, school officials. The devil is gay and in love with Saddam Hussein... don't you love it?

Some nice animation effects with hellfire and smoke.
- Brooks Robards

THE LAST BROADCAST

This is necessary viewing for both fans and detractors of THE BLAIR WITCH PROJECT, and anyone interested in the new wave of digital feature filmmakers garnering increasing media attention in 1999 (via the success of BLAIR and articles in zines like WIRED). THE LAST BROADCAST (1997) chronicles the terrible fate of a TV news team that ventures into the New Jersey wilderness to investigate the fabled Jersey Devil. Sound familiar? Well, don't be so quick to dismiss this as a Johnny-Come-Lately rip-off, which it most definitely is not; if anything, it's the Johnny-Come-Early precursor to BLAIR and one of the key independent films of the 1990's.

finally achieving widespread distribution on home video on November 30th after struggling for years to reach the market and its potential audience. Definitely predating both thunder-stealers, BLAIR WITCH and George Lucas' STAR WARS: THE PHANTOM MENACE, by a year or two, this nervy low-budget effort from Pennsylvania independent directors Stefan Avalos (who previously directed THE MONEY GAME, also on video) and Lance Weiler (currently working on his own solo debut feature) was the first feature to enjoy all-digital broadcast theatrical showings (in five concurrent venues in 1998), and tells its horror story via a calculated showcase of interviews, investigative TV journalism, and "found footage" of the narrative's central atrocity. Despite ongoing media coverage of their film in at least one major newsstand magazine per month since August 1997, Avalos and Weiler were unable to negotiate a palatable distribution deal for their film, choosing to self-distribute while suffering the frustration of their accomplishments being swept aside in the attendant promotion mounted for STAR WARS' digital theatrical debut and the rush to ballyhoo BLAIR WITCH's overtly similar content.

- S.R. Bissette

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TREKKIES

Great little documentary on the STAR TREK fan community and international convention scene, narrated and co-produced by STAR TREK: THE NEXT GENERATIONS' Denise Crosby, will be quite an eye-opener for the uninitiated. Though the need to enjoy the corporate sanction of Paramount undoubtedly curbed some of the filmmakers' instincts, this is still a compelling dissection of the ongoing phenomenon and (as amply proven by more than one snapshot herein) religious devotion spawned by Gene Roddenberry's sf series. Though the behavioral extremes occasionally veer close to lunacy and freakshow status, the tightwire walk between over-reverence and condescension toward the subject is successfully straddled, and the results are well worth an evening's viewing, whatever your attitude toward the entire STAR TREK franchise. Recommended.

- S.R. Bissette



THE BROTHERS QUAY COLLECTION

Kino on Video; \$24.95

INSTITUTE BENJAMENTA or THIS DREAM PEOPLE CALL HUMAN LIFE

Kino on Video; \$79.95

The work of MTV and festival favorites the Brothers Quay is seen in two new tapes from Kino on Video. The first collects ten of the brothers' short subjects while the second presents their live-action feature.

What has distinguished the works of the Brothers Quay is their style, flying, as it does, in the face of conventional thinking about stop motion animation. Traditionally, stop motion animation has been used to give life-like movements to creatures and characters that could not be realized on the screen by any other way. In American stop-motion, the overwhelming use of the medium has been in fantasy, science fiction, and horror films, with models being as reality-based as possible. For example, King Kong really does

look like a gorilla, while Ray Harryhausen's mythic creatures always appear as biologically sound entities. The only mainstream stop motion artist who opted for a stylized look and used his work for non-dramatic films was George Pal.

The Brothers Quay clearly reject the notions that stop motion animation must imitate life and that a story is important. The ten films in *COLLECTION* (representing work from 1984-1993) have little traditional narrative structure, beginning and ending equally enigmatically. What happens in between is sometimes amazing, sometimes frustrating.

What is always amazing, though, is the animation itself. Working with non-traditional materials for models — antique doll heads, pins, clocks, screws, cotton wool, calves liver — "found objects" used masterfully: yielding emotion from a china doll head that has a fixed expression and no eyes; making screws evocatively unscrew themselves out of a piece of wood.

What is frustrating, though, is the Brothers' rejection of a story. Their films are dream-like, their imagery oddly comforting or disturbing, but there are few points to it all. My problem with this collection is that after viewing ten of their animated films I wanted them to use their talent for animation and design to tell some sort of story. I should be careful about what I wish for.

In 1995, the brothers produced their first live action feature, *INSTITUTE BENJAMENTA or THIS DREAM PEOPLE CALL HUMAN LIFE*. Starring Mark Rylance, Gottfried John, Daniel Smith, and Alice Krige, this black and white film carries on the artistic sensibilities of the Quay's animated work. While the press material speaks of the film's "dark cynical humor" I have to say I found nothing remotely funny about this film. Set in an odd school for servants, the films follows one new student whose arrival unleashes the sexual passion in the school's two proprietors, a brother and sister.

The film is closest in tone to the oddball work of Guy Madden (*TALES OF GLIMI HOSPITAL, ARCHANGEL*, etc.), but Madden, no matter how strange a story he weaves, always gives his audience a linear narrative. The Brothers Quay instead present a narrative framework on which they instead hang atmosphere and emotions; but the emotions are hollow, lacking characterization. The lines blurred out by the actors at many times seem like non sequiturs with the result producing what seems like a very bad student film. At times, I thought they were parodying their own style, but I doubt this was their intention. Interesting, though.

- G. Michael Dobbs

LEGEND OF THE CHUPACABRA

Joe Castro's 1997 monster mockumentary also pre-dated *THE BLAIR WITCH PROJECT*, and unlike either *THE LAST BROADCAST* or *BLAIR WITCH*, Castro is never content to leave his horrors unseen when he can splash gore on the camera lens or rub our noses in slippery ribbons of innards. Female cryptozoologist and film journalist Maria Esperanza (Kalsy Joiner) and her crew, well-armed with cameras and guns, are determined to unravel the mystery of the latest Latino boogeyman, the "goat sucker" of contemporary urban and rural legend. This Troma pick-up amusingly synthesizes all manner of recent pop-horror artifacts, including *THE X-FILES*, *ALIEN AUTOPSY* footage, and more. Castro also designed and executed the toothy titular monster, which gets plenty of onscreen exposure before the final credits roll. Not to be confused with *GUNS OF THE CHUPACABRA* starring Kevin Eastman, which has yet to surface on video in the US.

- S.R. Bissette

A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM

Using a power 90's cast (Michelle Pfeiffer, Stanley Tucci, Calista Flockhart) to reframe a power play, this version of the Shakespearean classic is visually clunky. Lacking familiarity with the play's mythological roots, you'll have a hard time following plot and language.

Better to have mediocre Shakespeare than most of what passes for Hollywood storytelling.

- Brooks Robards

AUSTIN POWERS: THE SPY WHO SHAGGED ME

This presented quite a dilemma in the UK, where the term "shag" is the direct equivalent to "fuck," echoing the venerable tradition initiated by the Al Jolson musical HALLELUJAH. I'M A BUM (UK speak: "Ass") and continued by the family favorite "FREE WILLY" (UK speak: "Penis"). No doubt the Scots found plenty to savor with Michael Myers' new villain Fat Bastard, with his inexplicable fondness for baby flesh throughout. And what's with the Elvis Costello cute cameo shit, his second this year (see 200 CIGARETTES)? But, hey, baby, not to worry! How could anyone really take offense at this AUSTIN POWERS sequel, though it's not about a damned thing except further exploiting, promoting, and merchandising of Myers' fun initial romp as Britain's favorite spy invented by a Canadian? AUSTIN POWERS was funny, and it was about something, shallow as its premise (1960's mod spy and villainy culture-clashing with 1990's corporate world) may have been; THE SPY WHO SHAGGED ME hasn't a thought in its shaggy head. Heather Graham is a lovely ornament, though she's given nothing to do as Felicity Shagwell, a sloppy second to the original's Vanessa (Elizabeth Hurley, who gets short shrift here in the pre-credits opener). Seth Green at least gets some quality screen-time as Dr. Evil's son during the genuinely funny JERRY SPRINGER parody, and Dr. Evil's dwarf clone Mini-Me is an inspired creation. Fitfully funny, but before the climax it's as tired as the Bond series it lampoons: it took the Bond series four films to fall into this kind of formulaic rut. Here's hoping Myers and company give the inevitable second sequel a conceptual shot in the arm before the squeeze dry whatever charm is left to Powers. In the meantime, enjoy the silly laughs and easy evening's entertainment this will provide — you KNOW you're going to rent it, baby!

- S.R. Bissette

TEA WITH MUSSOLINI

World-class casting keeps Franco Zeffirelli's super-chick flick from turning into cotton candy. The plot puts art-loving English ladies in Florence during Mussolini's rise to power. Joan Plowright plays her usual doughty old lady, Maggie Smith is imperial and imperious as an ambassador's wife, Lily Tomlin plays a witty lesbian, and Cher is Cher... in spades. Only Judy Dench's talents are wasted as a ditz artist.

- Brooks Robards

THE HAUNTING

Hideous, over-blown betrayal of the brilliant Shirley Jackson source novel, The Haunting of Hill House, and its fine 1963 film adaptation. Anything of value in Jackson's novel is hopelessly cast aside a half-hour into the film, though it remains a classic case-study of 1990's Hollywood filmmaking-by-committee. Having unravelled the seductive characterizations and subtle unease of Jackson's novel in minutes, the film lumbers on. By the time the shy shut-in psychic Eleanor (Lili Taylor, giving a fine performance despite the ongoing, aggressive undermining by the nonsensical script and hack director Jan De Bont) finds the house's spectral forces have written her name in blood (dust in the novel), the film proceeds to lose track of its own story grafts. Is Hill House haunted by the ghosts of children, victims of its builder's heartless child labor practices? Ya, that's it! You can almost hear the committee gnashing its teeth on that one, as they realized that Dreamworks Pictures executives Spielberg, Katzenberg, et al built their own fortunes in part on Third World child labor. Oops! Can't hit that nerve again! Forget the child labor bit. So the source of the hauntings is changed again, and again, as the committee changes its mind, leaving the film to unreel in an increasingly noisy, explicit, and senseless plethora of special effects, until the narrative vacuum collapses in on itself. One of the novel's and original film's most chilling moments — "Who was holding my hand?" — is reduced to a meaningless line, tossed off in the wake of another explosion of effects. As with THE WILD, WILD WEST, the effects work itself is marvelous, more fine work from Phil Tippett (ROBOCOP, JURASSIC PARK, STARSHIP TROOPERS), but it's a hopelessly empty showcase, leaving its technical jewels swimming in Hollywood pigshit. Interesting only as a case study comparing the effectiveness of horrors unseen — as in Jackson's novel, or Robert Wise's original film adaptation THE HAUNTING, which I highly recommend — versus those seen, which was also determined at the summer box office when THE BLAIR WITCH PROJECT and THE SIXTH SENSE promptly eclipsed the comparatively feeble earnings of this shameful shambles of a horror movie.

- S.R. Bissette



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SPAZMO!

As any proud Polack would, I spent Oct. 11 with some of my cabbage-redolent brethren in Pulaski Park celebrating Columbus Day, which we've cleverly hijacked from the Italians and redubbed Pulaski Day. There was enough there to stir any Polish heart: colorful costumes, patriotic speechifying, and assorted gunfire. All that was missing was the sausage.

And speaking of sausage, the morning's affair got me thinking about politics. I couldn't help staring at Congressman Richie Neal, a noted local Polish-American, standing there in a sincere effort to express his heartfelt support of the contributions of Polish Americans, looking for all the world like a well-cured patrician kielbasa.

I was going to simply devote this space this month to more musings about the Northampton mayoral race, because God knows you're not reading enough about this in the establishment media. By the time you read this, you will have likely decided which pillar of the community deserves access to obscene amounts of your money, whether it be Big Mommy, Jr. or Rush Limbaugh Jr.

I'm looking to avoid the choice between approving a gold-plated high school/Olympic Village/Fire Station/health spa complex or endorsing the idea of gay men being used as speedbumps. I will likely write in Phil Sullivan instead, and it has nothing to do with the gigantic advertisement he took out in *VMag*. Honest. I don't see a cent of that.

I think electing Phil Sullivan for mayor would be cool because it would piss off the right people without actually putting anyone's life in danger. Judging by his glasses, he's got

fairly poor eyesight, and it would be an asset to those of us in the Myopic-American community to have a brother in City Hall. Maybe he could issue an edict against frilly fonts on restaurant menus.

I think big guys make good mayors. A fellow with a firm handshake, who you could imagine knocking back a few with at the bowling alley. It's why I think Bill Dwight will make a good mayor, as soon as he gets over this Amish-farmer-look-thing he's got going.

Let's face it, Phil would be a cool mayor to have in a parade. He's got the coolest car, and he smokes cigars old-school, not like one of these yuppie jerks who buy their stogies at some place that sells scented chachkes. Imagine Our Mayor, tooling in his grandpa tank, chewing a stogie with the windows up, in the Gay Pride Parade. Perhaps with the Bearded Lady at his side, whom he would keep calling "Stosh" because he would mistake her for some buddy he knew from the service.

Righteous.

Anyhow, looking at Richie got me thinking about all the other deserving characters whom we put on the dole, including the Nosferatu-like John Oliver and the pride of Easthampton, Nancy "Choose Death" Flavin. (She gets that moniker for a courageous and well-reasoned stand in 1997. When undecided about how to vote on the death penalty, she went with the option which would have killed some more people in the name of the state. But she didn't do it because it seemed the politically expedient thing to do, oh heavens no. It was because "people were upset about it." Thanks Nancy: next time I get upset about the surly collegiate waitstaff in Noho, I'll apply your logic and strangle them over my pesto.)

I used to pay a lot of atten-

tion to the details of politics, who voted what on which, who stands with which party. But I've seen these characters in action too long. Or what passes for action in their circles.

These guys (but let's not forget the gals either) are one of the last things we have resembling a nobility in this country: the political class. We provide them with room and board, perks and cigars, wine, women and song, and in return they explain quite calmly every few years why they need to keep their jobs.

Enough already. Looking at these guys go about their "jobs" on *C-Span* and the local media, I realize what it is that they don't have in common with the rest of us: fear. At any moment, with you or I, the rug could be taken out from under us by a malevolent and capricious employer. So you try to balance the scales by busting your ass. They don't have to do that. There is no fear, no hunger, because voters blithely rubber-stamp the residents of our House of Lords.

So if we can't give them fear of God, at least give them the certainty of death. I now never vote for the same politician twice, knowing that even the guy I like will become infected with The Sickness. We've seen it happen to the best of them, if there ever were any. Term limits, shmerm limits: one term, and that's it! If you don't get it done, leave it for the next guy. Just call me the Judge Roy Bean of the voting booth.

I now believe citizens should vote the same way they would play Whack-A-Mole: if one of them varmints sticks his head out long enough for you to get a gander at him, he deserves a whack on the noggin from your mallet.

So, when faced with a ballot-full of unopposed incumbents, write somebody in, or just don't vote. Don't bother coming if you can't be

creative.

I encourage voting, though. Check the newspaper the day before for some good names. If you're not sure about the person's character, pick someone from the obituaries. Pick the Marxist dictator of your choice. Pick your mom. Instead of voting yet again for Stan Rosenberg, I'm writing in the name of my favorite waiter here, who is the twin brother of South Park's Big Gay Al.

"That's super! Thanks for voting!"

Or perhaps you might write in the name of your favorite celebrity. This could be the year we elect Ricky Martin mayor of Northampton! Come to think of it, he actually might be the right candidate for us. Think of the crossover appeal, with the gay community and the growing Hispanic community. And that all-important 18-year-old girl community. Yes, indeed. We really need to reach out to them.

SHOOT THE MESSENGER

ROBERT TOBEY

GLITZ'N'TITS

Given that Rap really isn't about music, and that **Ricky Martin** isn't much of a musician, and that **Nine Inch Nails** is about the artsy destruction of musical form, and that **Blink 182** are a musical joke, and that **Britney Spears** is to music as bubblegum is to food, and that **The Artist, Prince**, did not, alas, perform, music played an exceedingly small role the **MTV Music Video Awards**. There was a judicious nod here and there towards the considerable and undeniable skill (and lavishly deep pockets) of certain of the video-makers: the slo-mo follow-the-bullet **Korn** video is a brilliant use of the form (it's perfectly concise and exquisitely ambiguous — when you have 3 minutes to sell a product to the whole world, then highly dramatic, endlessly suggestive, and ultimately pointless are apt selling points); and the **Ricky Martin** "Livin' La Vida Loca" video will stand the test of time as great Pop Product (in which the very lucky Mr. Martin plays the role of a remarkably handsome and convincingly animated prop — his performance live on stage for the show itself was not so convincing). And there was also a kind of curtsying towards an older understanding of what the words "music" and "musician" mean: the piling of praise and prizes on the slender and retiring form of **Lauryn Hill**, and her

delicate, ethically-minded, pleasant blending of hip-hop, gospel, and R&B, is highly symbolic and sharply out of context with the overall hellish, lascivious, thunderous, glittering, and downright pagan flavor of the event.

What the awards are about is spectacle and excess, or rather the spectacle of excess, and more exactly the conspicuous and aggressive flaunting of the spectacle of excess: Las Vegas for teenagers. Even **Regis Philbin** showed up to offer what the producers thought was a comical twist of irony: the square guy dropped into the hip hole. But the irony was lost on me. I was guessing that **Ed McMahon** must have been unavailable, that **Wayne Newton** might stop by to lend the show a little musical integrity.

Continuing with the Vegas parallel, I wouldn't go so far as to say that **Chris Rock**, the MC for the event, is an update of **Sammy Davis Jr.**, but there is a brand of tokenism in the role he played: as a foil for the mind-boggling luxury and its attendant arrogance. The show's producers knew they could count on him to be (and clearly he was given permission to be) rude and crude and mocking and raw, a corrective for the pomposity and fatuousness and commercialism displayed at every turn. In "rock and roll" (you must understand that at this level we can talk of "rock and roll" only in terms of saleable image) a certain appearance of street credibility is requisite. Without it, without at least the illusion of a resistive and rebellious

and no bullshit attitude the kids won't believe it and they won't buy it. Delivering his "outrageous" and "cutting" running commentary, Rock legitimized by delegitimizing. While ostensibly "taking down" the event, he's really raising and waving a flag of rock and roll authenticity and cheekiness, sending a signal to the kids that **MTV** is still walking the edge, still righteously disrespectful, and therefore worthy of a teenager's skeptical allegiance. I'm inclined to like **Chris Rock** — he's a comic who does tell difficult truths — and I'm not saying he didn't mean it (though the level of his reflections on this occasion were mostly shallow and personal: the Puerto Ricans are taking over, **Jennifer Lopez'** ass jokes, and **Ricky Martin** as a one-hit wonder), but his feverish delivery for **MTV** had the flavor not so much of the clown seer who has escaped the insane asylum and is alerting the populace before the authorities come grab him, but more that of a man already in constraints, trapped under a rock, squealing and flailing in pain and confusion.

In terms of Industry politics, and the susceptibilities of the public, the never-ending **Lauryn Hill** hoopla is ripe for deconstruction, and in light of the beastly-male heavy-metal thrash-rap, and girly-vamp soft-core teeny-froth that are now the dominant poles magnetizing the spectrum of pop music, seemingly way out of place. I think she's a sentimental favorite, her crowning a yearning for the old romantic idealistic uplift Americans used to get from pop, and are still nostalgic for. She's got something for just about everybody, but none of it is too strong to scare you off. She's just good enough, musically, to be better than most of what's floating in the mainstream, but not so good as to threaten with inaccessibility; she's gives off little gusts of toughness and moral

backbone (sweet memories of sixties protest) but her targets are general and vague, her complaints passive in tenor, easy to digest; she embraces and smoothly mixes styles old and new, a no-nonsense hip-hop street flair with a lush'n'lyrical throwback **Stevie Wonder**ish Motown dreaminess: charming attractions for a potentially huge multi-generational buying public. There are gospel stylings throughout, which answers to our current yen for some sort of fundamental non-relative set of values but she's not directly or specifically religious in a way that's alienating: she's a woman, demure and yet upstanding. You got your well-behaved-feminist thing covered (especially important when rancid leering guys and 'ho-posing girls are **MTV** staples, and rape — a logical consequence — is revealed as a **Woodstock '99** sideshow: the industry, I sense, is in a bit of a cold sweat over this); she's a mother, so no questioning those family values; and she is pretty and shapely; these days in TV show biz you just gotta be pretty and shapely, or pretty and pumped, or — the exception — if you're a funny frog-prince rap guy, homely and pumped, or — very rarely — homely and lumpy (with the proviso that the right 'ho's gonna change all that).

I don't think **Lauryn Hill** especially intends all these extraordinarily successful strategies. She has, in fact, the look of the deer in the headlights (her after-show observation was: "I think I'm getting all these awards so that I never have to go through this again"). She's earnest and she has talents. Like **Robert blah blah Waller** who wrote that forgettable book that **Clint Eastwood** made the movie of, it's just the right product for the right time and place and matrix of longing and denial. And in terms of the public, she's a bonafide and unanticipated phenomenon, and a telling indicator of what the public is not getting from its Corporate Music Source.

All of which makes me wonder what it was that I liked about **MTV** when it first broke-out a mere decade or so ago, the satisfying frisson that I felt. And I think it was the old thrill that I've always felt around rock and roll; that tingle you get in the presence of contraband

goods.

As anybody who really loves rock and roll knows, it's only really rock and roll when it's live on stage; when there's nothing but wildly-vibrating air between you and the fools on stage who are throwing themselves off the cliff of an excruciating and naked immediacy. But I've always harbored the hope — apparently perennial — that that aliveness could be brought across — could cross over, as it were — in the form of movies and TV, that mere media, complacent and second-hand by nature, could be made more immediate and real by the introduction of the energy of rock. My first disappointment (in 1969?) was **Jimmy Hendrix**' appearance on the **Dick Cavett Show**. It was great to see him moving and talking in real-time (up to that point I had only heard the records and seen still-photos) but his performance seemed puny and wrong, like looking through the wrong end of a telescope. TV had not been made larger by Hendrix. Hendrix, the giant, had been made smaller by TV. And then, horrible to behold, Cavett followed up with a mocking and dismissive interview.

It's worth remembering that for a long time — with sanitized and mostly disappointing exceptions — the only way to watch rock and roll was in live performance, which had not only to do with the live-theatre nature of the beast, but that the big media didn't want to have much to do with this particular beast. **MTV**, for a while, appeared to represent a real breakthrough. You could watch and hear rock on TV! All day long! Drugs for dinner! Candy for dessert! And at first the sheer novelty, and a rough low-budget documentary-styled honesty (bands standing there playing their songs), kept it real, with a remnant, or perhaps just an illusion, of the old danger: unmediated. (The exclusion of people of color from the original mix, though, was an early clue to the corruption at the core). However, as the budgets swelled, the cash rolled in, the deals got made, the markets got cornered, the VJ's and the performers got more air-brushed and air-headed, and the layering of special effects got deep enough to smother any edge or attempted meaning, it became clear that TV, and the

record companies and their mega-money had won again. The midgets, and their fat wallets, still rule the earth.

IN SINK

In a review for the *Union News* of a live performance by the band '**N Sync**, the writer writes: "Nevertheless, 'N Sync deserved major kudos here for at least playing their own instruments — however inadequately — during this song." Really? I guess it's not enough for the public to be throwing millions of dollars at these contrived mushball performers, now we're told we should also admire them for not being able to play their instruments. This is reviewing in reverse, the case of the "critic" being led by the nose by a lame "phenomenon," denying the evidence of his own senses, self-censoring, and putting an innocuous-seeming positive gloss on the facts. The interesting question is this: who's being sucked up to here, and why? The band and their record company, because they're so big and rich and powerful, and send you free records and tickets? The local concert providers and promoters, because they deliver ad revenue to the *Union News*? The newspaper's readers, because they'd be offended by a negative critique? Your editor/boss who's that much closer to management and the money, and looking over your shoulder? Typically, it's for all these reasons, but without well-defined delineation or calculation. Most of the censorship — is this really too strong a word for this process? — that takes place in America is self-administered, half-conscious, a kind of sleepwalking, going through the expected motions, just doing it the way that you're supposed to do it, inoffensively, the way it's always been done (with an implied threat hanging in the air that if you don't do it that way, there's somebody waiting at the door who will). And it is the invisibility of the process, with its benign air of good citizenship, that makes it so ingrained, ubiquitous, insidious and effective. So while you could imagine that fans of '**N Sync** are being served by the flattery — or at least flattered by the flattery — clearly who's not getting served here is the general public.



DAVE BIEDERMAN

MEDIA DOG

Three Cheers and an Obscene Gesture for the Wall Street Journal

The *Wall Street Journal* is the best newspaper in America. The reporting is top-flight; articles are well-written and researched to a fault. The WSJ pile on my kitchen table reveals a typical week's offerings; how music marketers use the internet to create superstars; the inside story of the \$4.9 billion liability verdict against General Motors; the use of flawed safety devices in commercial aircraft; the growing movement against genetically engineered foods; French retailers banding together to fight Wal-Mart, and how advertisers target the gay community.

But what makes the WSJ truly great is its editorial page, where corporate interests are defended with a blunt and brutal ruthlessness that makes the opinion pages of other big dailies seem comatose by comparison. While the *New York Times* and *Boston Globe* pretend to be objective — the old "paper of record" routine — the WSJ distorts reality, abuses the language, rewrites history and smears opponents as standard operating procedures. It is brazenly one-sided. It is everything an editorial page should be.

All of the brashness, irreverence and humor that once characterized the underground press in America has now shifted to the WSJ. While the language of the so-called liberal press is measured, abstract and qualified, the WSJ mocks every liberal icon and ideology with dead-on sarcasm and loathing. It is the WSJ that defines the terms of discourse; environmentalists are "eco-terrorists;" consumer advocates are "Naderites;" plaintiff's lawyers are "thugs" and "mafia." In a recent editorial lamenting our "culture of death," the WSJ cited as examples environmentalists —

for advocating population control — and abortion-rights advocates.

Whether it's pushing to expand the arms race, to destroy public education, to end corporate liability, to trash affordable health care — "patient's rights" is always in quotes — or to rehabilitate Richard Nixon's legacy, the WSJ makes its case with passion and flair. It is brash, and it has balls; "In a liberal society, it may prove too much to jail people for their personalities alone," wrote editorial page stalwart Holman W. Jenkins Jr., in proposing an alternative to gun control. "But the debate is worth having."

Best of all, the WSJ seizes on weaknesses in liberal reasoning and clings to them like a pit bull. The Pulitzer Prize-caliber reporting of WSJ writer Dorothy Rabinowitz on the Amirault case in Massachusetts, for example, is the sternest rebuke to the bankruptcy of liberal ideology in America. Just as the WSJ has thrashed Bill Clinton with a biblical fervor, the paper has seized on the treacherous negligence of the liberal press in refusing to denounce this travesty.

Three members of the Amirault family were convicted of hundreds of counts of child abuse in the notorious Fells Acres case, crimes they could not possibly have committed. Similar convictions that occurred during the child-abuse hysteria of the 1980's have been overturned. But because the Amirault convictions are the fruits of left-wing vice crusaders — zombies of the Andrea Dworkin/Catharine MacKinnon school of lunacy — they cannot be challenged in the *Globe*, *Times* or the "alternative" weeklies.

Go figure; the citadel of right-wing zealotry is the lone champion of the Amiraults, victims of the worst miscarriage of justice since the burning of witches in Salem. To paraphrase Yeats, "The worst are full of a passionate intensity," while the best... oops, there are no best.

Runner-Up Journalist of the Century

The great H.L. Mencken — journalist, polemicist, critic, pundit, sage, editor, scholar — is the runner-up in the *Media Dog Journalist of the Century Sweepstakes*.

Mencken possessed in spades the essential ingredients for great journalism; he was passionately curious about the world and was profoundly skeptical. He was one of the great prose stylists that America has produced. Mencken was prolific, brilliant, a giant; his keen scholarly mind and vast accumulated knowledge made him an American Samuel Johnson. His influence as a commentator on the American scene was greater than any pundit before or after him.

Mencken was born in 1880. In 1905 he wrote his first book, *George Bernard Shaw: His Plays*, reflecting a lifelong love of drama. Three years later, he wrote a book on the philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche. Throughout his life, Mencken wrote brilliantly on classical music and the great composers.

In 1914 Mencken and drama critic George Nathan took over the *Smart Set*, a New York literary review. Mencken, a longtime critic of the "Genteel Tradition" in American letters, championed — and in some cases introduced readers to — writers like F. Scott Fitzgerald, Sherwood Anderson, Willa Cather, Eugene O'Neill, Theodore Dreiser, Aldous Huxley and James Joyce. In 1924 the two men founded *The American Mercury*; its purpose was "to attempt a realistic presentation of the whole gaudy, gorgeous American scene." The *Mercury* was one of the most influential journals in the history of American letters.

In 1915 Mencken began work on *The American Language*, a celebration of the native American tongue that took over 20 years to complete and ran to over 1,000 pages. It is widely considered to be one of the great non-fiction works of the century.

Treatise on the Gods, a study of the origins and degraded state of religion, was greeted with critical acclaim and was the first of many Mencken broadsides against the contemporary practice of religion. *In Defense of Women*, which Mencken wrote in response to the suffragette movement, is a caustic look at the relations between men and women that anticipates the gender wars of the last 30 years. *A Book of Prefaces*, with brilliant studies of Joseph Conrad and Theodore Dreiser, is

a pinnacle of American literary criticism, a craft at which Mencken was a master.

The autobiographical **Happy Days**, considered by some to be the best account of an American boyhood after **Huckleberry Finn**, was followed by **Newspaper Days** and **Heathen Days**. Culled from profiles that Mencken contributed to the *New Yorker*, the **Days** books contain some of Mencken's greatest writing.

"The Sahara of the Bozart," one of over 100 pieces that Mencken wrote for the *New York Evening Mail*, was a devastating indictment of Southern literature and culture. Fred C. Hobson, author of **Serpent in Eden: H.L. Mencken and the South**, credits it with sparking the Southern cultural renaissance of the 1920's.

As a newspaperman Mencken was peerless, his output voluminous. By the age of 21 he was Sunday editor of the *Baltimore Herald*; by 25 he was editor-in-chief. He moved to the *Baltimore Sun* and, despite brief exiles for his opposition to the U.S. entry in both the First and Second World Wars, stayed until 1948. As a columnist he savaged every religion, politician and sacred cow in sight. He was biased against anything he regarded as ignorant, small, hypocritical or ugly. The six-volume **Prejudices**, with devastating wit and matchless prose, takes aim at every instance of smugness, pretense and hypocrisy in the Republic. Mencken was conservative, libertarian, compassionate, radical, a Tory, a Presbyterian, a realist. He is the grandmaster of irreverence in journalism; he could not exist in today's corporate, politically correct media.

Mencken covered every major political convention between 1906 and 1948 and wrote scathing portraits of Harding, Coolidge, William Jennings Bryan and Franklin D. Roosevelt, whom he described as a "milch cow with 125,000,000 teats." All of them knew him by name. His coverage of the Scopes trial — Mencken convinced his editors to bail out John Scopes and to hire Clarence Darrow to defend him — is a benchmark for reporting. He got to the heart of the matter; a lover of classical music, Mencken cherished the notion that Beethoven never had a following among those damning Scopes for teaching evolution.

"The fact saves good Ludwig's bacon," he wrote. "His music survives because it lies outside the plane of the popular apprehension, like the colors beyond violet or the concept of honor. If it could be brought within range, it would at once arouse hostility. Its complexity would challenge; its lace of moral purpose would affright. Soon there

would be a movement to put it down, and Baptist clergymen would range the land denouncing it, and in the end some poor musician, taken in the un-American act of playing it, would be put on trial before a jury of Ku Kluxers, and railroaded to the calaboose."

Mencken's mistrust of politics and government was profound and abiding but, unlike the pack journalists of today, he did not pander to the masses. "It is one of my firmest and most sacred beliefs," he wrote in "On Being an American," "that the government of the United States is ignorant, incompetent, corrupt and disgusting." But as for the American people, they constitute "the most timorous, sniveling, poltroonish, ignominious mob of serfs and goose-steppers ever gathered under one flag in Christendom since the Middle Ages, and they grow more sniveling, more poltroonish, more ignominious every day."

Journalism was also a target. "It is this vast and militant ignorance, this wide-spread and fathomless prejudice against intelligence, that makes American journalism so pathetically feeble and vulgar, and so generally disreputable," he wrote in "Journalism in America."

One of Mencken's greatest essays is "Puritanism as a Literary Force." Written in response to Anthony Comstock's Society for the Suppression of Vice, which moved to censor numerous writers, the essay is a defining statement on American politics and culture.

With the end of the Victorian age Americans found themselves in a cultural void, and American political ideas began absorbing "all the rancorous certainty of their fading religious ideas, so that devotion to a theory or a candidate became translated into devotion to a revelation, and the game of politics turned itself into a holy war."

"There has not been a presidential contest since Jackson's day," wrote Mencken, "without its Armageddons, its marching of Christian soldiers, its crosses of gold, its crowns of thorns. Every campaign that we have seen for 80 years has been, on each side, a pursuit of bugaboos, a denunciation of heresies, a snouting up of immoralities."

Mencken also identified a creature that is everywhere today; the professional moralist. "This is the essential fact of the new Puritanism; its recognition of the moral expert, the professional sinhound, the virtuoso of virtue," wrote Mencken. "They are not pastors, but detectives, statisticians and mob orators. They combat objection with such violence and with such a devastating cynicism that it quickly

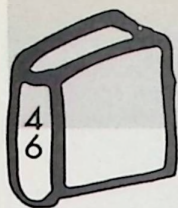
fades away. The more astute politicians, in the face of so ruthless a fire, commonly profess conversion and join the colors, and the newspapers seldom hold out much longer. The result is that the "investigation" of the social evil becomes an orgy, and that the ensuing "report" of the inevitable "vice-commission" is made up of two parts sensational fiction and three parts platitude."

Mencken's command of the English language, and his writing — joyful, exuberant, vigorous — were second to none. So was his integrity; his mission was "the annihilation of frauds of all sorts." As we move towards the millennium, let us consider Mencken's assessment of our great nation and revel in his glorious prose:

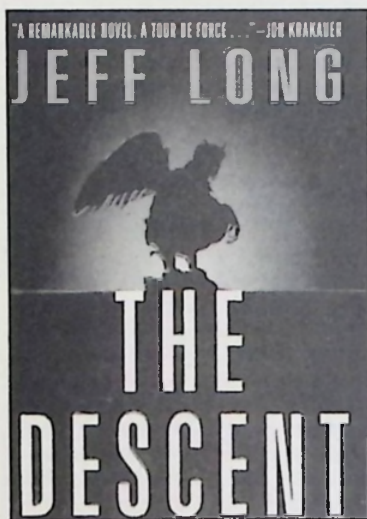
"Here the general average of intelligence, of knowledge, of competence, of integrity, of self-respect, of honor is so low that any man who knows his trade, does not fear ghosts, has read fifty good books, and practices the common decencies stands out as brilliantly as a wart on a bald head, and is thrown willy-nilly into a meager and exclusive aristocracy. And here, more than anywhere else that I know of or have heard of, the daily panorama of human existence, of private and communal folly — the unending procession of governmental extortions and chicaneries, of commercial brigandages and throat-slittings, of theological buffooneries, of aesthetic ribaldries, of legal swindles and harlotries, of miscellaneous rogueries, villainies, imbecilities, grotesqueries, and extravagances — is so inordinately gross and preposterous, so perfectly brought up to the highest conceivable amperage, so steadily enriched with an almost fabulous daring and originality, that only the man who was born with a petrified diaphragm can fail to laugh himself to sleep every night, and to awake every morning with all the eager, unflagging expectation of a Sunday-school superintendent touring the Paris peep-shows."



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BOOKS



The Descent
by Jeff Long
Crown Publishers
\$24.00

Forget about the myth and religion of Hell.

Jeff Long's *The Descent* brings Hell into real and physical being. It becomes a cavernous world of death and darkness, an eons old land of cultures and textures, and a home peopled by devils that turn out to be not so different from us. The idea that our world and its cultures have been influenced by these infernal hordes throughout time, while appalling to some, lends a dynamic aspect to the quest for human origin, language and societal structures. When this land beneath our own is discovered, invented with appropriate recognition given to Jules Verne and H.G. Wells (not to mention Dante and Virgil), there becomes a twisted race between a group of scholars searching for an historical Satan, the world-wide military seizure of entrances to the underworld, and a corporate attempt at total control of Hell. Everybody's motives become suspect and it truly seems that the Devil is winning the war for mankind's souls, albeit in a secular-humanist sort of way. Nature

and instinct battle with intellect and justice, while every thing is warped by belief, hope, despair and, in the end, a kind of love.

The book is filled with action. The struggle for survival between humans and hadals (the devils) at first puts us sun-dwellers at the disadvantage. Then the story changes and Long does an admirable job drawing a sub-textual comparison of western colonial views of cultures and peoples once known as savages ripe for conquest and the similar views held towards the hadals. He does not, however, forgive the hadals their bestiality, nor does he forgive us ours. The narrative treads a dangerous area in making no judgments and placing the idea of evil, as a force, in question relative to viewpoint, culture, and societal organization. It comes as no surprise that Long was an election supervisor during Bosnia's first democratic elections. It seems that he has had a good deal of experience in a situation of conflicting morality and factional wrong-doing. Perhaps his knowledge of the Bosnia crises allowed him an inside look at a world model where evil and righteousness go hand in hand in respect to all sides.

The main body of the story follows the many disparate characters through their searches and machinations in our world to a corporate "science" expedition through the underworld in an attempt to not only take over Hell, but also wipe out it's whole civilization and ecosystem. The corporate head honcho appears to be even more evil and diabolical than Satan. The Devil is merely killing out of preservation and manipulating the other characters for help in his personal quest (which I shall not mention). Without giving away too much, I would like to say that what could have been a really powerful ending quickly became an example of dwindling expectations. The harrowing flights into Hell grew more and more devastating. I was unfortunately lulled into the expectation of climactic resolution or at

least some philosophical take on why there can be no resolution in regards to the question of evil. What I got was a poorly explored Satan and a big wimp of an ending. I felt cheated and somewhat let down. The excitement and suspense built to towering proportions right up to the last few pages of the last chapter but then it turned into a bike tire with a slow leak. Not even a cool blow out, although Long did leave the idea open for a sequel (or, hopefully, he was merely trying to spark the reader's own imagination to take the story further). Besides this wuss of an ending, the only other real loser of a component in the novel is a useless and predictable love affair. The upside is that the affair is between Ike, a guy more hadal than human and Ali, a Catholic nun. I liked the part when the grotesque and mutated devil-man and the nun poke one another most lasciviously. Deliciously irreverent, I must say. All in all *The Descent* is an exciting and excellent read.

Jeff Long is a veteran mountaineer and climber, having traveled the Himalayas and uses this experience to great effect throughout his cavernous underworld. He has worked as a journalist, historian, and as noted above was an elections supervisor in Bosnia. *The Descent* is his fourth novel. Check out www.thedescent.com for more info.

- Duke Aaron
Il Duce

The Bad Girl's Guide to the Open Road
By Cameron Tuttle
Art by Susannah Bettag
Chronicle Books
\$14.95

Chalk one up for Grrrrl power! This is a funny, inspirational, and handy little book. It is geared towards those Thelma and Louise wannabes who have that urge to go out on the open road and get away from it all. It is designed as a handbook, including comical illustrations and tips on everything from fashion/beau-



ty to how to formulate your alter-ego road trip personality. Some of it is based on silly situations (i.e. 14 ways to open a beer bottle with your car, and bad things to do in a small town), but it also has a lot of useful info, such as what to do when your car breaks down and how to weasel your way out of a speeding ticket. Even just a quick read of this book will motivate you to hit the road and not look back. Bonus: It includes a Road Sister bumper sticker to proudly display your new wild image to all those who pass by!

- Andrea Carlin

The Ground Beneath Her Feet **by Salman Rushdie**

Henry Holt

\$27.50

Salman Rushdie's new novel, ***The Ground Beneath Her Feet***, is a massive tomb of spiraling myth, metaphysics, crashing realities and, in the final analysis, unrelenting, ponderous, boredom. Rushdie is without doubt a master of language. His word-play, structure and story-telling rises to high form here. The flights into myth, dissection of cultures and personality, the piling of metaphor upon metaphor, all come together to make *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* a wonderfully, no, majestically written work. Yet this high praise fails to do anything about the significant plot and character flaws. It may seem daring to someone from Rushdie's upper-class British temperament to re-make the myth of Orpheus with two clownish rock and

rollers. Yeah, if Elvis and Tina Turner had been star-crossed lovers, this book could have been no less dull than with the fictional rocker/lovers, Ormus and Vina. His fantastic use of language and whirling character sequences fall prey to a certain cuteness of plot and character choice, but to the novel's credit there is much going on here.

Multiple storylines, both realistic and multi-dimensionally fantastic, weave in and out of one another. From the beginning years of Ormus and Vina's life in Bombay, to England, and finally to America —apparently the Olympus of this story— we are treated to a slice of world culture that is rare to see. *Of course* it is rare to see, because it takes place among the wealthy elite of these various lands. There is a disturbing longing felt throughout the pages for a time when England was the world: there is a moment in the narrative that lays blame on said nation for abandoning its trust (read conquests) and "cutting the strings" to what are now a multiplicity of nations struggling to regain their lost selves. America is a dark and dangerous seductress and India is merely a place to leave. At worst Rushdie can be compared to Ormus' delusionally Anglophilic father and at best can be merely labeled culturally confused: truly an argument for proving that class is a much stronger distinction in the world than ethnicity or nationality. To his credit, Rushdie attempts to tackle these issues, but unfortunately is unable to grasp his theoretical and upper-crust limitations. There has been much comparison of this book to James Joyce (particularly *Ulysses*) and to a lesser degree the sparkingly deadpan word-play of Pynchon. I must protest. Mr. Rushdie is all thumbs in contrast with Pynchon's magic puns and the mere suggestion that ***The Ground Beneath Her Feet*** comes close to Joyce, even at his worst, is first simply absurd and second insulting to both the English language and literature as a whole. Regardless of

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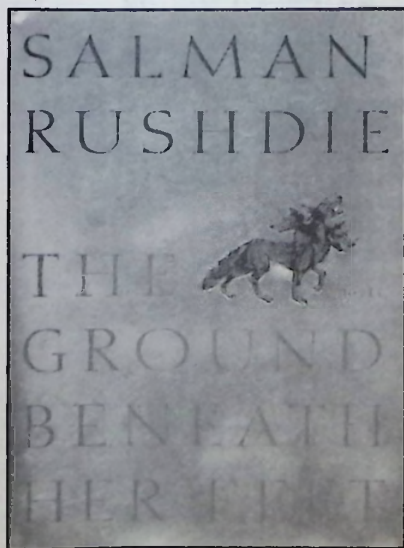
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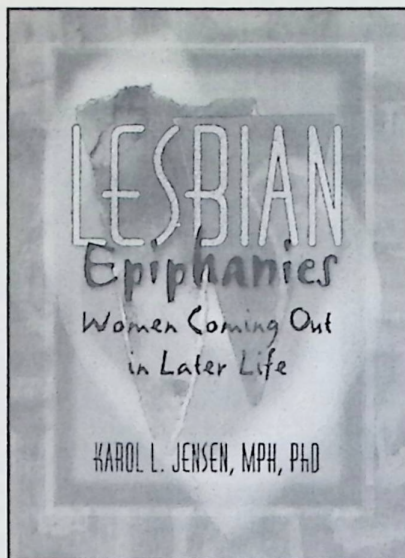
whether this novel is good, bad, or indifferent (my vote is indifferent), Rushdie has clearly not reinvented the wheel here, nor has he even built a better mouse trap. This is not, however, criticism of the book, but merely a rebuke of the marketing juggernaut behind it. A good tale is a good tale, but we don't have to say that it rivals the heights of literature throughout the ages, do we?

The two lovers are terribly miscast for their roles as mythic figures. Ormus' dead twin lives in his head singing rock tunes a thousand and one nights (heavy handed I assure you) before they are released. Ormus plays air-guitar as an infant. →



He sees and has visitors from a close, but alternate, reality. Vina lives life as a visceral thrill. She devours it. She "wants more than she wants," to quote from the novel. Her lover, Rai (the erstwhile narrator), is her only secret. In a life lived in all openness and in-your-face style, he is the only dark, closeted skeleton. Interesting, yes but they don't reach the potential of the mythic. They seem like every other rock mega-star. This is the fatal flaw that drags down everything good about this work. The clashes of financial titans, the world-rending crash of differing realities, the Orpheistic descent into hell that is all but necessary for the tale being spun here; all fall flat due to the unworthiness of the characters. Their rebuke of home and quest for America, English nostalgia aside, creates a sense that Rushdie fails to truly comprehend the globalism he attempts to portray. The wealthy of all nations have always had access to the world, but total access of the elite is not a development in cross-cultural pollination. It is a symptom. The tremors shaking the world in **The Ground Beneath Her Feet** are not the shakin' of rock, but a shaking of the Rushdie's relevance to international literature. Besides, the book was a struggle to read, not because of complex language, but because it was impossible to feel or care about the subject matter and characters. Rushdie tells us that our celebrities are the new gods. All they ask is for worship. All they expect is everything. Well, yeah true, but Gods? A new pantheon? Hardly. Without looking at the means and modalities of pop-culture this reasoning appears true on face value, but dig in even to a shallow level and his morphology breaks down quickly. The gods of the Greeks, the Zoroastrians, the Norse, these spanned time. They created and destroyed. They gave and they took. They defined a people and defined culture over millennia. Is Bono a new Odin? Hardly.

-Duke Aaron
Il Duce



**Lesbian Epiphanies:
Women Coming Out
in Later Life**
by Karol Jensen
Haworth Press
\$19.95

So there I am snuggled in my tent at a local campground on a rainy weekend with five books and two dogs. From across the way I hear a very feminine voice exclaim, "Oh, no! I got a ketchup spot on my white shoes!" Another woman's voice comforts her, "Oh, don't worry, it's not very noticeable, and they're still very white." And I turn to Molly Wolly Doodle who's lying beside me and I say, "And that's why I'm a lesbian."

Well, okay, it's not that simple. In fact, my journey to Lesbos has been long and circuitous. I'm a fifty-year old, thrice married, mother, synagogue religious school principal who's official coming out took place about five years ago. So who would be a more logical choice to review Karol Jensen's **Lesbian Epiphanies: Women Coming Out In Later Life**?

Jensen's book is very readable. A psychotherapist, Jensen is a woman who transitioned from married mom to lesbian. Jensen acknowledges her limited research — her subjects are twenty-four white mid-western women who volunteered for her study. It's not so bad — there's at least one Catholic and a Jew. Her scholarly research is rather impressive, although I am puzzled that she did not include Barbee Cassingham's and Sally O'Neil's classic **And Then I Met This Woman: Previously Married Women's Journeys into**

Lesbianism. That book made its home in my underwear drawer for a full year during my third and final heterosexual marriage. You can draw whatever Freudian references you wish from that. What Jensen presents is more than twenty-four psychological studies. **Lesbian Epiphanies** is an excellent and essential sociological study of women's sexuality in America.

Jensen writes about the process of learning and understanding one's sexual identity and gender orientation in a society that sends mixed messages to girls and women. Her first chapter, which is concerned with sex education and information, makes it clear that there is still a double standard in our society when it comes to sex. Despite the proliferation of woman-as-slut in advertising, movies, music videos and TV sitcoms, women are not supposed to be sex savvy and good girls still don't. Men want their little girls to be innocent i.e. ignorant, but want their wives to be sex goddesses. It shouldn't come as a surprise, then, that many women aren't successful in their metamorphosis and, instead, stay bound in their cocoons. The conflict makes it difficult for women to recognize and embrace their sexual identity and sexual desire. Knowledge of self is blocked.

"You're certainly not yourself today." "I so seldom am," said Cecelia. (**To The North**, Elizabeth Bowen, 1933). We so seldom are. We are reconfigured, reprogrammed, redesigned, willingly and unwillingly, consciously and subconsciously, on a daily basis. Who we are, too often is who we are expected to be. Women become wives, Jensen says, because either they are not aware of the options or because the options are too forbidding. Young gays, lesbians and bisexuals living in gay friendly college campuses, towns and city districts should not be lulled into thinking America is a safe place for them. Matthew Shepherd was murdered one short year ago. Jerry Falwell still has a large following and a large family. Ted Turner's World Championship Wrestling introduced, only six months ago, Lenny — a pig-tailed, body-glittered, ultra-fey wrestler. In the October 12th morning edition of the *Washington Post*, columnist Lisa de Moraes writes, "When Lenny entered the arena, the live audience would chant anti-gay slurs that *Post* editors deemed unsuitable for print. And when he got the stuffing beat out of him by an opponent, the crowd roared." Homophobia is alive and well in America.

The lesbian, Jensen reminds us, carries the image of a sex obsessed woman. "Our society promotes the homophobic distortion that since her sex life can be separated from procreation or 'wifely duty,' the lesbian may be seen as only sexual." And I'm here to tell you that it's not only with Southern Baptists and Midwesterners. After coming out to a very liberal woman rabbi, I asked her how I should go about coming out to the people in the congregation in which I work. Her response? "Why should you? Your sex life isn't anyone's busi-

ness." This view keeps many women from accepting that they could be lesbian. "To incorporate lesbian or bisexual into her concept of herself," writes Jensen, "She needs to alter the homophobic attitudes she has internalized from society."

In addition to the homophobic myths and stereotypes they inherited, "these women were restricted by a dearth of positive lesbian and bisexual role models" — not only in public life but also in their private lives. We older women didn't have Ellen Degeneres and kd lang to point to and say, "That's who I wanna be like when I grow up." Me, I wanted to be James Dean. As for role models in the family, the lesbian aunt — if acknowledged at all — was described as "odd" or "different" and the woman with whom she shared her home was her "friend." And, despite the funny little emphasis on "friend," most young girls didn't pick up on its implications.

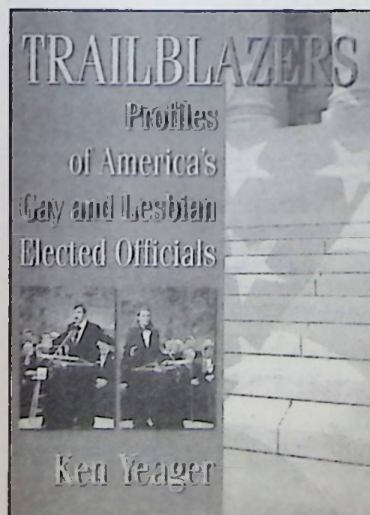
Jensen doesn't rail against the patriarchy. She quietly and firmly drives home the point that a patriarchal society is not a healthy environment for women, particularly lesbians and bisexual women. Come to think of it, it's not a healthy environment for men either, particularly gay and bisexual men. We don't even have to go into how dangerous and destructive a climate it creates for transgender people. Virginia Slims has helped woman gain equality in the lung cancer and emphysema divisions, but we haven't "come a long way, baby." If you have any doubt that traditional patriarchal male and female gender roles aren't being touted today, just watch Saturday morning kid show sponsors' insidious commercials. And keep in mind that homophobia fits very nicely inside those nice little gender roles.

The good news is that all of Jensen's subjects are happy with who they are — now that they are themselves. The thought of coming out, they — and I — discovered is much more frightening than being out. Our lives weren't ruined. Lightning didn't strike us. Most people are pretty cool with it. Those who aren't can be easily dismissed.

Lesbian Epiphanies is a damn good book. I recommend buying it in quantity. Keep several copies on hand. They should be given freely to middle-aged women who have come out later in life and/or their husbands, freaked-out parents whose middle-aged daughters have come out, every psychotherapist in America, and especially to every smarmy LUG who peers through large, square black-rimmed glasses and asks in a loud shrill voice, "So what took you so long to come out? Didn't you KNOW?" Upon handing the book to the latter you are permitted to respond as or more loudly, "Do we know the word BOUNDARIES?"

Happy reading.

- Joyce Singer



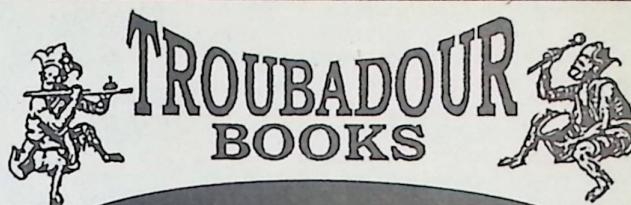
Trailblazers: Profiles of America's Gay and Lesbian Elected Officials

by Ken Yeager
Haworth Press
\$29.95

Written in an easy to read, easy to reference style, **Trailblazers** is an interesting look at American politics from the levels of local elections to Congress. Ken Yeager eschews the easy discussion of gay politicians on the national level and gives a coherent look at gay and lesbian officials at all stages of government. Local Council seats,

Mayors, School Trustees, here are the places elected officials can change the shape of American discourse. Yeager profiles fourteen gay and lesbian elected officials with a broad spectrum of politics, style, race, and circumstances.

The bios are short, solid descriptions of the candidates, their agendas, and the circumstances surrounding them both before and after election. Some are easily accepted, some are not. Some are more out than others and the book, lightly, touches on what that means in politics and often more importantly, in gay politics. There is no in-depth political analysis here. What we have is a general survey and **Trailblazers** would be more suited to a high school government/Poli-Sci course than the adult readers it seems to be addressing. Yeah, I know, what's the likelihood of the book reaching a high school reading list? Zero to none, but the local level politicians he describes are just the people making important strides in changing that sad reality. I might also



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suggest that parents of school age children could buy it for them on their own, especially you Northampton residents. With the current race for mayor between Higgins and Long, this book is both timely and important. Gender and sexuality are very large sub-texts to this heated race.

Yeager manages to give a good feel for each of the officials he describes, discusses their campaigns, and most importantly, allows them to explain why their interest in civics, community involvement, and electoral politics is important to them. He manages to show a wide spectrum of officials; differing ethnicities, differing politics, differing areas of the country. The many levels of American government open up and the reader sees that the big-wigs in Washington aren't the only ones making and changing laws in our "land of the free." There is an appendix that is a chronology of gay and lesbian elected officials and another that lists gay and lesbian officials nationwide. Yeager tends to over-emphasize the Stonewall riots as the harbinger of gay and lesbian activism, but this doesn't detract from the book. I eagerly await a more in-depth and scholarly book on this subject and hope that the wonderful Haworth Press has something in the works.

Ken Yeager was the first openly gay elected official in the Silicon Valley, has over twenty years experience in electoral politics, and worked as a congressional press secretary in DC. He currently teaches political science at San Jose State University. For more information on The Haworth Press and their other titles try <http://www.haworthpressinc.com>.

- Duke Aaron
Il Duce

Planet of the Jews by Philip Graubart Creative Arts \$13.95

The bulky, rectangular spaceship landed on a Friday morning. Four small, roly-poly human-looking creatures with blue skin waddled out, presenting themselves to the large group of Jews who had been expecting their arrival for the past six weeks.

"Shalom Aleichem, Yidden!" the tallest, fattest, and bluest one exclaimed.

No, Mel Brooks isn't doing a riff on the *Teletubbies*. These Chosen Aliens are brought to you care of Northampton's own Philip Graubart, in his new book **Planet of the Jews**, which is well worth buying for its title alone.

Graubart, the only rabbi in my experience to discuss Klingon culture from his place at the podium, is a big sci-fi buff, and the long-term affection for this at times cheesy literary form comes through warmly in his novel, which is actually a book-within-a-book.

Story-wise, **Planet of the Jews** is the tale of Judah Loeb, fiction editor for *Astounding Tales Magazine*, who one day gets a visit from Moishe and Esther, a somewhat irritable Hasidic couple bearing a manuscript which Loeb reluctantly publishes and causes a sensation with. The manuscript is, of course, called "Planet of the Jews."

This is where the book gets fun. "Planet of the Jews," and subsequent sequels published in *Astounding Tales*, tells of the journey of an intrepid band of Jews who escape Earth when their leader, tycoon Evan Isaacs, starts having conversations with what appears to be God.

God, or whoever it is, warns Isaacs that the Ukrainian Alliance is poised to launch a Holocaust which will make the first one look like a tea party. With the help of a Hasidic rabbi named (wait for it) Judah Loeb, Isaacs manages by hook or by crook to shuttle thousands of his coreligionists off the planet and hurtling towards a beckoning alien world.

Pretty heavy stuff for what purports to be lightweight sci-fi, but it works, and entertains. What follows is a humorous array of set pieces involving the intergalactic Diaspora in their new home. I'm not a big reader of science fiction, but I was repeatedly reminded of the little sci-fi I've read (and the more extensive amount that I've seen in movies and TV), particularly

The Martian Chronicles, **A Canticle For Leibowitz**, and certain episodes of the *Twilight Zone*.

The twisty-turvy, things-are-not-as-they-seem plot also reminded me of *Star Trek: The Next Generation*, though it never got as tiresome as *TNG's* repeated this-never-really-happened-they-were-on-the-holodeck-the-whole-time episodes. It keeps you guessing, and is never predictable.

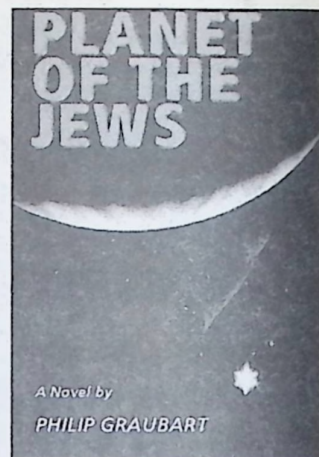
Back in the real world, we follow Judah's travails with his publisher, his attempts to interview his aging uncle about his Holocaust experiences, and his growing desire to know more about Moishe and Esther. I have to admit I was drawn more to the sci-fi inner book, which screams screenplay to me, but I was fascinated by how the author manages to mystically intertwine the lives of his "real" and "fictional" characters.

There's a lot swimming around in this slim, unassuming trade paperback. Assimilation, evolution, sex, war, Talmud, smoking and relativism are dived into in quick succession, in a story that delightfully flows along on a number of levels.

I look forward to the sequels. **Beneath the Planet of the Jews?** **Escape from the Planet of the Jews?** And let's not forget those action figures, either.

(*Planet of the Jews* is available at *Beyond Words*, *Broadside Books* and other local bookstores; the publisher's website is www.creativeartsbooks.com.)

- Puncio Godyn



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POLITICS IMPANELED: SPEECHES FROM POLITICAL COMIC BOOKS

Mom told me there were two things I should never bring up in conversation: religion and politics. She must've told that to comics publishers, too, for as rarely as religion is ever brought up in comic books (Spire Christian Comics and *Shaloman* aside) politics is even more rarely brought to light. (*Brought to Light* is itself a one-time "graphic novel format" comic book of political misdoing.) While newspapers still publish strips such as *Doonesbury* and *Non Sequitur* which trade in political comedy, comic book political commentary has been pretty much the province of 60's and 70's underground comix (*Slow Death*, *Last Gasp*) and a few mainstream books (*Green Lantern/Green Arrow*, *Black Panther*, and sporadic issues of *Daredevil* and *Fantastic Four*) which, like much good that came in those years, have been pretty much forgotten in contemporary cynicism or sugared nostalgia.

SANCTUARY

Only one recent near-mainstream title has made politics its focal point, the Japanese comic (translated into English), *Sanctuary*, writer Sho Fumimura and artist Ryoichi Ikegami's epic story of two young men determined to alter the destiny of Japan, one by rising through the ranks of Japanese politics, the other by rising through the ranks of the Japanese gangster underground. Taut, tense drama laced with scenes of explicit sex and violence (completely proper within the context of the narrative) traces the story of Akira Hojo and Chiaki Asami, who grew up in and fled a Cambodian concentration camp, surviving only on wit, good luck, and iron-willed determination. It is their vision of a new Japan that drives them, and later those they come to influence. Sleek, often photo-realistic art and terse, speakable dialogue combine into compelling reading.

The speech: addressing the nation about its children, Asami declares: "If they get a proper education, if they learn of freedom, if they learn of their basic human rights, and if they learn of the duties and responsibilities that go with those rights, then, for the first time, they will begin to think about who they are, about what a nation is, and about what they must do with their lives. Today the world is torn by war and

conflict. I believe the root of all these problems lies in education! How we live our lives is determined not by instinct but by our will. Human beings are the most wonderful resource the planet has. And that implies enormous duty and responsibility. As human beings we must never forget that! Whether or not we kill each other, kill our country, or kill the planet depends entirely upon us."

Available as trade paperback collections from Viz Premiere, POB 77010, San Francisco, CA 94107.



AMERICAN FLAGG

The one US title that comes close to *Sanctuary*, at least as a portrayal of a government facing revolutionary change, is *American Flagg*. Howard Chaykin's vision of a future America as one great Mall full of gangs, private armies and black-market basketball. Chaykin's agent for change is Rueben Flagg, former video star of *SexusRangers*, replaced by a hologram of himself, and now an idealistic government agent smacking up against "the way things are done." Chaykin's deeply-layered, well thought out future, love of wordplay and sharp, stylish drawing blend into a fully realized world with complex individual characters whose interplay makes the story of resilient idealism versus resistant indifference an exciting, amusing reflection of "the way things are," right here, right now.

The speech: Flagg explains to a friend: "The American spirit—the honest, openhanded driving force of solidarity—has been castrated. Betrayed by the banks, by big business, by slimy fat cats who use Patriotism like a tart uses cheap perfume—. Someone's got to stop the decline—or try! The U.S.A.'s gonna be 300 years old in '76. I'd like to do my bit to make it a happier birthday."

Originally from the now-defunct First Comics, the first dozen issues of *American Flagg* have been collected into two trade paperbacks available through local comics retailers, although more likely on the net.

V FOR VENDETTA

A dark, bleak, fascist Britain is the background for writer Alan Moore and artist David Lloyd's *V For Vendetta*. An enigmatic figure of great, almost preternatural strength, intelligence and charm, V begins an inexplicably able campaign to topple the abusive, Orwellian government that holds Britain, nose to the grindstone. But it's Moore's supporting characters who deepen the story: Edward Finch, the dispassionate, politically disinterested head cop who wants only to end the killing spree of the "subversive nutcase;" Adam James Susan, Britain's Leader, who embraces Fascism as society's only hope in the face of poverty, malcontent and war; and, especially, Evey, the sixteen-year-old girl V transforms from under-educated naïf into a well-educated revolutionary. Lloyd's dark, gloomy art is lit primarily with blues and browns, yet conveys every whim and fear of every character. Moore uses every possibly pertinent "v" word the dictionary can offer—victory, vision, vendetta—yet crafts dialogues to be read aloud with pleasure.

The speech: Evey asks: "All this riot and uproar, V, is this Anarchy? Is this the land of Do-as-you-please?" V proclaims: "Our masters have not heard the people's voice for generations, Evey, and it is much, much louder than they care to remember. No, this is only the land of Take-what-you-want. Anarchy means 'without leaders,' not 'without order.' With anarchy comes an age of True Order, which is to say, Voluntary Order."

V For Vendetta is available as back issues and as a trade paperback collection from DC Comics.

SUPERMAN FOR PEACE

Individual issues of other comics have addressed political issues, particularly DC's *Animal Man* and, most notably, their *Superman For Peace* (by Alex Ross and Paul Dini), in which Superman has an opportunity to address Congress.

The speech: In conclusion: "We are all citizens of the earth. We are divided by differences of language and culture, of race and nation—but we all live upon the earth. This is our home. We cannot let it die. It is within our power to reverse the destruction of the earth. It will not be easy, and it will not be accomplished overnight. But we must start now... every one of us. I cannot save the world by myself. A thousand supermen could not do all that is necessary to save this world. We are, all of us, part of the problem. We must all be part of the solution. I have lost one world already. I don't want to lose another. I ask for your help... to save a world... to save our Earth."

- Matt Levin



illustration by
Timothy Miner

The Wonderful Horrible Realism of Charles Bukowski

"I don't trust men who don't drink. There is something about drinking which opens a man to extraordinary disaster: you meet all the wrong women and you step out into alleys to duke it with all the wrong men. It's kind of a lesson in stupidity but you learn more in that kind of life than most men who live 10 lives."

- Charles Bukowski

Drunken
rapes,
whores,
insane
lovers,
horse
races,
assaults,
suicide.

Bukowski
wrote what he
knew and
what he lived,

by Duke Aaron
Il Duce

but that isn't what gave life to his work. He had the ability to lay the worst elements of life on the table before us and still, magically, capture the kernel of human sentimentality that makes us cry over someone else's misfortune or even, occasionally, give the sucker an even break. He was born Henry Charles Bukowski, August 16, 1920, in Andernach, Germany. His father was an American, his mother, a German citizen. He was raised in Southern California and is considered by many fans and critics to be the physical embodiment of the psychic real-estate known as Los Angeles. Bukowski produced over 70 books of poetry, short stories, novels, and a screenplay (*Barfly*); loved playing the horses, classical music, drink and women; worked as a dishwasher, truck driver and loader, mail man, guard, gas station attendant, stock boy, warehouse worker, shipping clerk, post office clerk, Red Cross orderly, and an elevator operator; was an editor of *Harlequin*, and *Laugh Literary* and *Man the Humping Guns*, as well as a columnist for *Open City* and the *L.A. Free Press*. This man, whose writings were eventually translated into over 21 different languages, also made it through two years of L.A. City College before dropping out to bum around country and world. Perhaps there is a lesson here for the journalism and literature majors; maybe instead of applying to that great M.F.A. program and learning just the right techniques to get published, you should carve a hole in a watermelon, fuck it, and write (there are plenty of fruit and vegetable substitutes for you women writers available as well). He did just that and was the darling of the academic world for a time. Bukowski died of leukemia, March 9, 1994, in San

Pedro, CA at the age of 74.

Bukowski became known, at first, for his poetry. He put out nearly 50 volumes, from 1959's *Flower, Fist, and Wail* to the posthumous work that is still being released and collected; seven novels, from 1971's wonderful *Post Office* to 1994's grapple with death, *Pulp*; there are almost 20 collections, large and small of his short stories, and Black Sparrow Press with his long time editor, John Martin, are planning to release "new" material for years to come in posthumous editions. While Bukowski and his work have achieved a certain "cult" status in the last few years since his death, his detractors are many. Often times he is dismissed as a cruel misogynist, a racist, both as too intellectual or anti-intellectual; all of this is true, yet much too simplistic to discuss either his life or his writing. It's impossible to understand him in a vacuum. His contemporaries have to be held up alongside, both to compare and contrast. Burroughs, Kerouac, Creeley, and Gysin come most readily to mind. Bukowski lived in extremes, like many of the "Beat" writers. The norms of society were not for him and he set out from his abusive home, described in the 1982 novel *Ham on Rye*, to live in the fringe. His work documented, in a twisted form of autobiography, journalism and fiction, life, in much the way Kerouac's stories and novels did. Unlike Kerouac, however, Bukowski lived his work for real and did not escape back to mommy whenever the money ran out. He didn't report what went on around him, but rather, intertwined his art and life completely.

Bukowski's self-destruction was his saving grace. He turned his alcoholism, barroom brawls, degrading loves and passion for the races into tales that are both compelling and repugnant. The best and worst of humanity came out in these stories and he, often as the character pseudonym Henry Chinaski, played the fool and the foil as a way of conveying our internal conflicts; in his work, people are allowed their foibles, we eat, shit, drink, fuck, and sometimes even (horror of horrors) fart. In our baseness, we become ennobled. We are allowed authentic alienation through his work, not the over-the-top literary alienation that plagued Creeley and Burroughs. Creeley isn't really worth discussing, but William S. certainly is. Bukowski's writing style is the exact opposite of

what was best about Burroughs work. The language is simple and direct. The emotions are in front of us and come through strongly from interpretation rather than explanation. The reader is lulled into the idea that, "Hell, I could write this shit," and in this way can become intricately caught in the stream of story. This is deceptive and brings us back to similar conclusions that plagued another drunken genius, Jackson Pollack. The amount of raw emotion that can be packed into a Pollack painting or a 10-line poem by Bukowski is staggering and yet we feel as if we are part of it. We know that we've felt it before and the fact that it is now right before our eyes, lets us know there is hope in humanity, even at it's worst, even at it's lowest. We are all alone and in that loneliness, together.

The epitaph on his tombstone reads, "Don't Try." Like everything Bukowski wrote, this simple and straightforward message hides complexities and uncertainties, reasons and meanings, honest truth and a certain amount of false bravado mixed with longing. His old fans and the ever-growing cache of new ones need to be able to look beyond the legend and myth that surround this important body of work, look beyond the drunken stupidity and see the snapshots of sad/beautiful humanity captured within the stories. In one of his several collections of Poetry, Bukowski's friend Gerald Locklin warns us:

*those who would write like bukowski
know that he, as a young man, loved
classical music, wrote every day,
read world literature, supported himself
without parental or government assistance,
and drank a lot.
but when it comes to modeling themselves
on him as writers
they tend to forget everything
except the drinking.*

He abused himself and the people around him, won, lost, created and destroyed. He might be the greatest American writer of the twentieth century or the worst drunken hack there was; posterity will decide, but above all else, he tried and in the end, succeeded. This has to be acknowledged, by the new hype around him, his fans and his detractors as well. Besides, who else could use the word "beer-shit" in a poem and really mean it from the heart? What other writer could tell a compelling tale of falling in love with a corpse, fucking her all night long, and wistfully floating her body out to sea at dawn? For another writer this would be a story of fear, horror, and evil, but with Bukowski it was shadowed by our need for human contact, expressed the sadness of love, and laid bare the loneliness of the spirit. Bukowski's writing, stories, novels, and poems, came in great greasy gobs, all over the face of literary America; for many it was repugnant, but for a few, myself included, the taste was sweet and we swallowed every last word and phrase, licking our lips and waiting for more.



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The Teapot is a new player in downtown Northampton, a gourmet Japanese/Chinese restaurant. Sushi is one of their strengths. The menu covers a wide variety of Chinese and Japanese cuisine, not all that different from some other local spots, but the decor and presentation is what sets them apart.

The appetizer menu is almost a potential meal in itself. The scallion pancakes are less greasy and much tastier than the norm. Both egg and spring rolls are more substantial than anything in the area. Miso soup fans and hot and sour soup connoisseurs will also agree that this is the place to go for a quick hot snack.

The vegetarian entree menu is anchored by Vegetarian Paradise, which was the meal of choice for my veggie-chomping co-reviewer. The tofu was top quality, served in a thick rich tamari sauce, the vegetables in a spicy garlic sauce —broccoli, snow peas, baby corn, onions— rich and spicy; delicious.

General Tso's chicken was a delight; visually stunning and while not as spicy as I would have liked, it was still sweet and tasty.

Several nights later we returned for take-out sushi a la carte. All our sushi selections (Tekka Maki, Alaskan Roll, Natto Maki) were exceptional; the rice done to perfection, the fish (salmon, tuna, yellow tail) fresh and tender, the soy bean and scallion of the Natto pungent but not overpowering.

Lots of menu choices and not very pricey make this a place you'll want to come back to. A welcome addition to the already diverse downtown menu. Highly recommended.

- Tony George

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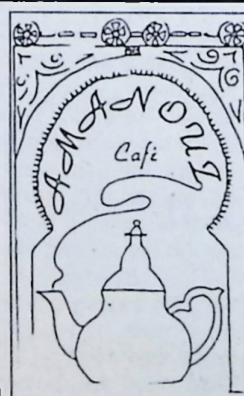
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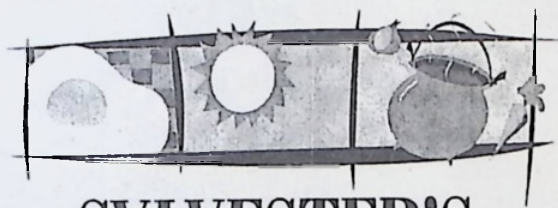
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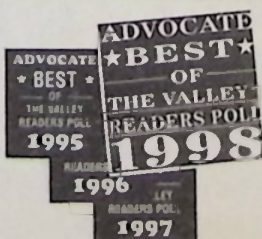
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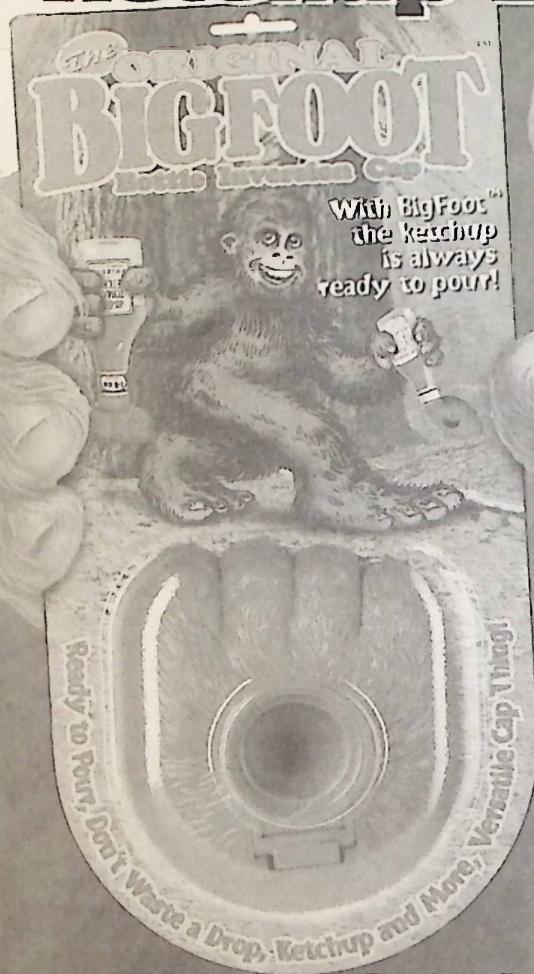


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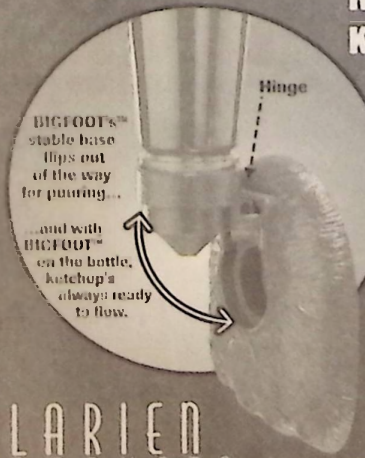
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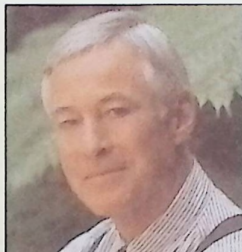
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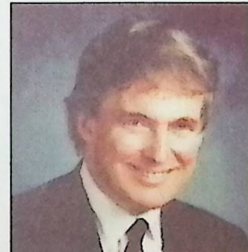
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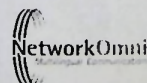
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